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An Examination of What Principals Do to Create a Positive School Climate for Teachers in
Elementary Schools and How Teachers Perceive Those Efforts

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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‘Finish last’ will always be better than ‘Did not finish,’ which always trumps ‘Did not start.’ ~unknown

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It was because of my parents that I started this, but it is because of you that I finished. Thank you. With love, Mom

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Abstract

AN EXAMINATION OF WHAT PRINCIPALS DO TO CREATE A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR TEACHERS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND HOW TEACHERS PERCEIVE THOSE EFFORTS

By Carol Anne H. Ziolkowski, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015

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This qualitative study of elementary school climate explored the actions principals take to create or maintain a positive school climate for their teachers and teachers' perceptions of those efforts. The study included individual interviews of four elementary school principals to determine what they intentionally did to create or maintain a positive school climate. Next, focus group interviews of general education teachers from within the four participating schools were conducted to determine how teachers perceived the efforts of the principals. The findings in three of the four schools indicated several discrepancies between perceptions of the participating principals and teachers. While teachers acknowledged and appreciated some of the efforts of the principals, the teachers did not recognize those efforts as contributing to the climate of the school. The participants of the fourth school shared perceptions that the efforts of the principal had created a positive school climate. The principal maintained an open-door policy and built strong relationships with faculty members. The teachers perceived those efforts as contributing to the positive climate of the school.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This dissertation is a qualitative study of elementary school climate: of the actions principals take to create positive school climates for teachers and teachers' perceptions of these efforts. The study includes interviews of elementary school principals to determine what they intentionally do to create or maintain the positive climate of their schools. Additionally, focus group interviews consisting of teachers within those schools will shed light on how those efforts are perceived. Found in this first chapter are the background of the study, problem statements, research questions, professional significance, and overview of the methodology.

Background

Climate Defined

Multifaceted in nature, school climate is difficult to describe in a single definition. Hoy and Miskel (2005) claimed that climate is what makes each school unique and influences the behavior of the members of each school. In 2002, Hoy, Smith, and Sweetland described school climate as an overall concept that encapsulates the environment of the school and is felt by administrators and teachers affecting their outlook and the way they behave in the school. Smith and Maika (2008) further clarified by stating that climate is seen in terms of teachers' behaviors towards each other as well as the principals' leadership styles. Halawah (2005) suggested the climate of a school establishes not only an interest and concern for all students but support as well. Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) determined and Ross, McDonald, Alberg, and McSparrin-Gallagher (2007) agreed that shared values play an important role in defining climate. Another team of researchers described school climate in terms of the interactions students have with each other and with teachers (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008).

A positive school climate is reflected in positive students, teachers, and administrators and their relationships within and among those groups (Hoy, et al., 2002). Hoy et al. (2002) ascertained that positive teachers enjoy their job, students, and colleagues and they strive for excellence. This research team further described teachers as having a strong sense of worth in not only themselves but their students as well. They set high yet attainable standards. In a later study, Ross et al. (2007) agreed with Hoy et al. (2002) stating that schools with positive climates have clear and high expectations for both student academic achievement and behavior, making student background an unacceptable excuse. Hoy et al. (2002) determined that the students in a school with a positive climate appreciate hard work and those who achieve academically. Additionally, Hoy et al. (2002) explained that principals in a school with a positive climate not only set high standards for their teachers but also help their teachers attain those standards. Overall, Hoy et al. (2002) described a positive school climate as one with excellent interpersonal dynamics.

Importance of School Climate

Although defined in rather nebulous terms, the importance of school climate has been long recognized and documented as described in the following research. Teachers' morale, student achievement, school disorder, school crime rates, multicultural practices, the successfulness of a school, development of social competence in students, acceptance of comprehensive school reform programs, and effective learning environments have all been associated with the climate of the school (Bulach, Malone, Castleman, 1995; Chen, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Thomas, 1997; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Lumsden, 1998; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Desimone, 2002; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tubbs & Garner, 2008; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes,

2010; Sterbinsky, Ross, & Redfield, 2006; Lee, 2000; Kartal & Bilgin, 2009; Kilinc, 2014).

When school climate was perceived as positive, staff morale was high. When school climate was not positive and teacher morale was low, then job performance decreased (Freiberg & Stein, 1999). Additionally, research showed that when teachers were not satisfied at work, both the teachers and their students suffered as a result (Anderman, Belzer, & Smith, 1991). When teacher morale was high, according to Thomas (1997) and Lumsden (1998), student achievement increased.

Much research supported the link between school climate and student achievement. Bulach et al. (1995^b) explained that even though other factors such as socioeconomic issues also related to student achievement, school climate could be purposely altered therefore contributing to an increase in student achievement. The climate of schools differentiated levels of achievement among them according to Gunbayi (2007). Desimone (2002) contended that a positive school climate was associated with successful schools. Bulach et al. (1995^b), Gottfredson et al. (2005), and Zullig et al. (2010) supported the theory that student achievement and school climate were positively related. Bulach et al. (1995^b) indicated that the climate of the school could also be helpful in predicting the achievement of the students.

Conversely, Gottfredson et al. (2005) reported that a negative school climate was linked to higher rates of crime and student delinquency. Additionally, when teachers perceived a negative psychosocial climate, higher rates of disorder were also reported according to Gottfredson et al. (2005). More recently, Mehta, Cornell, Fan, and Gregory (2013) suggested that student perceptions of a bullying climate were associated with lower levels of student commitment and less student involvement in school related activities.

Principals as Key Agents

An abundance of literature supported the importance of the principal in either creating or maintaining the climate of the school (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, Lee, 1982; Barth, 1986; Pallas, 1988; Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1995; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, Dipaola, 2006; Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Williams, Persaud, & Turner, 2008; Cohen, McNabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Devos & Bouckenoghe, 2009; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010; Smith & Maika, 2008). Most researchers agreed that the principal was in a unique position and was responsible for creating the school's climate (Barth, 1986; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Cohen et al., 2009). Additionally, research tied the specific style of leadership to the school's climate. In other words, certain leadership styles played a role in developing certain types of school climates (Bossert et al., 1982; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Nir & Kranot, 2006).

While some research suggested no ties existed between leadership styles and the climate of the school (Bulach et al., 1995^a), most supported a direct link (Bossert et al., 1982; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Egley & Jones, 2005; Nir & Kranot, 2006; Moolenaar et al., 2010; Sahin, 2011). For example, Pepper and Thomas (2002) ascertained and Moolenaar et al. (2010) agreed that the transformational leadership style created an environment conducive to a positive school climate. Further, Pepper and Thomas (2002) claimed the transformational leader was instrumental in creating a positive climate. Bass (1985) agreed, describing the transformational leader as one who motivated employees to accomplish more than first expected.

In a later study, Moolenaar et al. (2010) described the transformational leader's success in terms of the close relationship between the leader, faculty, and staff members thus making communication more effective. Halawah (2005) and Arlestig (2007) indicated that a school's

climate was linked to the effectiveness of the principal's communication. Two-way communications, according to Halawah (2005), kept faculty and staff, to include administrators abreast of concerns such as safety issues that could then be addressed, monitored, and controlled instead of being allowed to fester and cause more problems.

An invitational leader, according to Egley and Jones (2005), tried to create a school climate that invited all members of the school to achieve success. Egley and Jones (2005) described the invitational leader as one who did not emphasize power to influence others but instead tried to create a sense of collaboration, caring, and respect within the school community. Although not pointing to one leadership style over another, Tubbs and Garner (2008) agreed and claimed that the principal needed to concentrate on building a positive school climate by providing opportunities for faculty members to achieve, feel responsible, and feel competent.

MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) proposed that leadership behaviors or actions were more important than a particular leadership style in determining the climate of the school. Research indicated the behaviors or actions of the administrators were essential in creating the school's climate (Anderman et al., 1991; Bulach et al., 1995^a; Thomas, 1997; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Rubin, 2004; Kelley et al., 2005; Halawah, 2005; Devos & Bouckenoghe, 2009; MacNeil et al., 2009; Shouppe & Pate, 2010). Examples of non-specific behaviors that supported or created a positive school climate follow. A leader had to create a collaborative environment that promoted cooperation and empowered teachers (Thomas, 1997; Hofstrand, 2003; Halawah, 2005). Anderman et al. (1991) found that a positive school climate was developed by principals who monitored student grades and effectively supervised teachers while Kelley et al. (2005) suggested an effective leader was essential. Several researchers agreed that supportive and strong principals created a positive climate

(Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Dagli, 2012).

Rubin (2004) contended that a positive school climate depended on the practices of a principal to ensure a safe school. Still others found that in order to build a positive school climate, principals had to build trust (Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Kelley et al. 2005), develop respect (Anderman et al., 1991; Karakose, 2008), have clear goals (MacNeil et al. 2009), a shared vision, and a good rapport (Pepper & Thomas, 2002). MacNeil et al. (2009) added that the principal needed to create structures that could support the school in times of stress. Finally, Halawah (2005) suggested principals must display behaviors of confidence, friendliness, and resourcefulness to develop a positive school climate.

More specific leadership behaviors were also indicated in the research but similar to the non-specific suggestions, researchers did not offer many identical suggestions. One theme that emerged from the research suggested that principals interested in creating a positive school climate should praise teachers (Anderman et al., 1991; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Related to praise, researchers claimed that displaying teachers' honors and awards throughout the building in prominent places would build positive climate by creating a sense of pride and accomplishment (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003).

Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasized the art of storytelling during gatherings of students, teachers, and parents to illustrate expectations and values thus maintaining a positive school climate. Research also revealed other forms of communication such as sending frequent memos to the staff and faculty (Arlestig, 2007), providing two-way discussion opportunities between the principal and team leaders to share concerns (Arlestig, 2007; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Halawah,

2005), creating a teacher advisory program (Hofstrand, 2003; Pepper & Thomas, 2002), and creating a faculty advisory council (Hofstrand, 2003).

Research indicated that a positive school climate was more likely when principals showed support by frequently visiting teachers' classrooms (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009) and participated in instructional activities (Kruger et al., 2007). Additionally, a positive school climate was more likely when principals allowed for common planning time (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Lawrence, 2005; Pepper & Thomas, 2002), listened to teachers (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Pepper & Thomas, 2002), encouraged professional development (Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Egley & Jones, 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Pohlen, 2008; Ross et al., 2007), offered tiered professional development (Rubin, 2004); and actively shared leadership responsibilities (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). Similarly, Arlestig (2007) asserted that when principals make major decisions without including teachers in the process, the teachers became suspicious of the principals. Other suggestions for improving school climate were that principals should encourage teachers to be innovative (Anderman et al., 1991) and to participate in school decisions (Anderman et al., 1991; Thomas, 1997; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Egley & Jones, 2005).

Mullen and Patrick (2000) suggested the principal should work closely with the community business partners to build a positive school climate. For example, Mullen and Patrick (2000) reported one principal in their study worked directly with a local church to provide food and clothing for children in need.

Hofstrand (2003) also suggested ways to create or maintain a positive school climate such as landscaping the school grounds, maintaining building repairs, and sending get-well notes to faculty and staff members. Other researchers claimed that the principal should focus on the

relationship between themselves and parents, students and teachers (MacNeil et al., 2009). This was supported, in part, by Marsh, McGee, and Williams (2014) in their findings that strong relationships were characteristic of schools that had a positive climate. Salisbury and McGregor (2002) recommended that the principal should work toward solving staff problems rather than replacing staff members to create a positive school climate.

Still others insisted that the climate of the school was impacted by the principals' choices in daily routines such as how time was spent, what topics were discussed, which books were read, and which workshops were suggested (Deal & Patterson, 1999). Salisbury and McGregor (2002) also suggested that the principal should model professional growth by publishing or presenting.

Finally, Rubin (2004) and Nocera, Whitbread, and Nocera (2014) contended that a positive school climate resulted when the principal supported a tiered discipline approach where the entire school community had adopted the same set of rules. The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) was one such tiered discipline approach that claimed to increase the likelihood of a positive school climate (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008). Based, however, on Arlestig's (2007) suggestion, this type of school wide approach should include the teachers' input before being implemented.

In 1982, Bossert et al. maintained that further research was necessary to identify factors at the school level that could be manipulated by the principal to create a positive climate. It was evident from the literature that research in this area had continued but no real agreement had evolved in terms of what made a positive school climate. In 1989, Kagan concluded that teachers perceived the school's climate as positive when the teachers' cognitive style matched the principals' leadership style. Findings of the studies of Bulach et al. (1995^a) and Shouppe and

Pate (2010) indicated that as long as the needs of the teachers were being met, as perceived by the teachers, any leadership style or set of behaviors had the potential to produce a positive school climate.

Teachers' Perceptions of Principal Behaviors

In addition to the role the principal played in determining the climate of the school, the teachers' perceptions of those actions should be considered (Porter, Lemon & Landry, 1989; Bass, 1985; Pashiardis, Costa, Mendes, & Ventura, 2005; Arlestig, 2007; Cohen et al., 2009; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Gunbayi, 2007; Kelley et al., 2005; Bulach et al., 1995^a; Barth, 1984; Shouppe & Pate, 2010; Rhodes, Camic, Miburn, & Lowe, 2009). Research showed teachers' perceptions were important for a variety of reasons (Milstein, Golaszewski, & Duquette, 1984; Pashiardis et al., 2005; Kelley et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2009; Kruger et al., 2007). For example, the climate of the school suffered or flourished depending on the perceptions of the teachers and principals (Kelley et al., 2005; Pashiardis et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2009). Kelley et al. (2005) further clarified that when the teachers perceived that the principal unfairly assigned duties, the climate of the school suffered. Additionally, Kelley et al. (2005) indicated that when the teachers perceived that students were disciplined unequally, the climate also suffered even if the principal perceived the opposite.

Research also indicated that the principal must be aware of teachers' perceptions if they wanted to create or maintain a positive climate (Porter et al., 1989; Kelley et al., 2005; Tubbs & Garner, 2008; Lumsden, 1998; Bulach et al., 1995^a). Arlestig (2007) and Holdaway et al. (1993) found that even though the principal believed the teachers felt the climate of the school was positive, the teachers' perceptions revealed the opposite was true.

Another area of concern was perceived communication. Researchers reported that principals felt they communicated sufficiently while teachers perceived their efforts as lacking (Bass, 1985; Arlestig, 2007). Researchers also indicated that principals perceived they provided adequate feedback following observations, whether formal or informal, but the teachers perceived the principals were not interested because there was not enough feedback (Bass, 1985; Barth, 1984; Freiburg & Stein, 1999; Egley & Jones, 2005; Arlestig, 2007).

In their 1993 study, Holdaway and Johnson explained that principals frequently rated their school with a more positive climate than their teachers, thus indicating a difference in perceptions. This finding was supported in later research as well (Hoy et al., 2002; Kelley et al., 2005; Arlestig, 2007; Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007).

In 1986, Fisher, Docker, and Fraser determined that few researchers had studied teacher perceptions. Even as recent as 2010, researchers continued to claim more studies were still needed in this area (Kelley et al., 2005; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Koth et al., 2008; Shouppe & Pate, 2010). The recognition for continued study of teacher perceptions supported the importance of perceptions. Johnson, Stevens, and Zvoch (2007) contended that in-depth teacher interviews were necessary in obtaining teachers' perceptions.

Kelley et al. (2005) concluded teachers perceived the behaviors of the principal differently and might realize which actions contributed to a poor climate, but were unwilling to bring them to the principals' attention similar to the Blind Spot in the Johari Window. This information held by teachers was critical to improving the school's climate (Pretorius & deVilliers, 2009; Karakose, 2008). While Pashiardis et al. confirmed the importance of the teachers' perceptions in their 2005 case study, they had differing results regarding a gap between teachers and principals' perceptions.

Based on an understanding that principals could improve their leadership skills if they were aware of teachers' perceptions, Pashiardis et al. (2005) conducted the case study, in part, to determine if a gap existed between the principal's and teachers' perceptions of the principal. While Holdaway and Johnson (1993) found there was a discrepancy between teachers and principals' perceptions, Pashiardis et al. (2005) reported the opposite. They actually found a high level of agreement in the perceptions.

It was important to note that the 2005 study conducted by Pashiardis et al. occurred in Portugal where the principal was required to teach in the school for a minimum of five years. Teachers from within that school elected a principal. The principal then remained in the administrative position for three years. When that principal's term was completed, the teachers had the opportunity to select the same principal or choose a different person to fill the position. If a different person were elected, the out-going principal would return to the same school as a classroom teacher. In their conclusion, Pashiardis et al. (2005) offered several explanations for the high level of agreement between the principal perceptions of himself and the teachers' perceptions of the principal. They concluded that the principal's leadership style promoted consensus in the decision making process rather than a top-down approach. Arlestig (2007) supported this adding that when teachers were not included in the decision making process, they became mistrustful of the administration. The method of leadership in the Pashiardis et al. (2005) study allowed for everyone's voice to be heard as well as an opportunity for staff members to become well acquainted with one another. Pashiardis et al. (2005) attributed the principal's ability to manage effectively a school to his wealth of experience and knowledge in administration as well as his awareness of teachers' perceptions.

Finally, Pashiardis et al. (2005) pointed out that principals in Portugal were elected by colleagues not appointed by an outside administrating body. They continued to explain it was to the principal's re-election advantage to be highly aware of teachers' perceptions and to manage the school in such a way as to maintain a positive school climate with satisfied teachers. Pashiardis et al. (2005) acknowledged that when the teachers' and principal's perceptions matched, the school climate tended to be more positive. If the perceptions differed, teachers tended to behave based on their own perceptions not necessarily true reality and the school became dysfunctional as a result.

Understanding the importance of school climate, the role of the principal, and the need to recognize teacher perceptions, the purpose of this study is to explore what elementary school principals think they intentionally do to promote a positive school climate for their teachers. Additionally, it is to discover the teachers' perceptions of the principals' actions.

Problem Statement

Establishing or maintaining a positive school climate is crucial to quality education as is indicated in the research (Gunbayi, 2007; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Zullig et al., 2010; Bulach et al., 1995^b; Desimone, 2002; Wilkes & Blackbourn, 1983; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Freiberg & Stein, 1999). A positive school climate has long been associated with student achievement (Bulach et al., 1995^a; Tubbs & Garner, 2008; Freiberg & Stein, 1999) and teacher morale (Lumsden, 1998; Thomas, 1997). Lumsden (1998) and Thomas (1997) reported that when the teacher feels good about what he or she is doing, student achievement increases. Additionally, when teacher morale is high, an environment conducive to learning is evident (Lumsden, 1998). I intend to explore the actions adopted by elementary principals that create or maintain a positive school climate while investigating teachers' perceptions of those actions with the intent of

helping principals to improve their school's climate thus potentially improving other areas associated with a positive climate such as teacher morale (Lumsden, 1998; Thomas, 1997) and student achievement (Freiberg & Stein, 1999).

Research Questions

The following general questions served as a guide in the research:

- a) What intentional actions do elementary principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers?
- b) What are the elementary teachers' perceptions of the specific actions adopted by the principals to create a positive school climate?
- c) To what extent are the perceptions aligned?
- d) Does the alignment differ across varying achievement levels?

The study necessitated locating elementary principals and teachers who were willing to participate. Thus, I distributed an electronic invitation to participate and a letter explaining the study to the elementary school principals in one approved district. I followed up the letter with a telephone call to further explain the study and encourage participation. Based on the response from the invitation, I then interviewed the principals and form focus groups of teachers of the participating schools. I then sent an electronic invitation to the regular education teachers of the participating schools that explained the study.

Since one of the purposes of the study was to determine what principals believe is important in establishing and maintaining a positive school climate for teachers, the principal interviews were crucial in gathering data. Additionally, the teacher focus group interviews shed light on how the teachers perceived the actions of the principals. It is my belief that this

information will help guide elementary principals in making any necessary adjustments to build or maintain a positive school climate. I used an interview guide based on the literature to interview the principals and teacher focus groups. The guide may be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Professional Significance

The purpose of this study was to determine what actions elementary school principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers. Additionally, this research focused on the teachers' perceptions of the principals' actions.

Although a review of the literature indicated researchers have studied school climate, little research focused on the actions of the principals deemed helpful in terms of the teachers' perceptions. This study centered on investigating the intentional actions of the principals of selected elementary schools with regard to their school climate and conducting focus group interviews of the teachers of those schools to determine their perceptions of the principals' actions.

This research was founded on the understanding that while principals make efforts to create and maintain a positive school climate, their beliefs might differ from the perceptions of the teachers in their schools. With a better understanding of the perceptions of the teachers, perhaps principals will be able to make enlightened decisions regarding their efforts to create a positive school climate. Examining the areas of principals' intentional actions and the perceptions of their teachers' simultaneously with respect to school climate, the results contributed to the body of knowledge on the topic of establishing and/or maintaining a positive school climate.

Overview of Methodology

Qualitative Design

This study utilized a qualitative design of two types of interviews. I chose this design to ensure a meaningful study. The first purpose of the study was to examine what elementary school principals do to create or maintain their school's climate. I individually interviewed elementary principals in one approved district. In participating elementary schools, focus group interviews of teachers were conducted. The initial invitation was to four elementary schools in a district in southeastern United States. The four schools represented each of the corridors within the district.

The method of a study refers to how data collection occurs (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Since I employed interviews as the primary means of collecting data, this study met the requirements of qualitative research. The research design for this study was qualitative because I wanted to investigate a social phenomenon in a natural setting using multiple methods that were interactive, humanistic, and full of description and details from participants (Lund, 2005; Jackson et al., 2007). In this study, I was interested in perceptions of principals and teachers. Sogunro (2001) indicated that the researcher needs to determine the best approach for the study being conducted. Since the study focused on perceptions, Kelle (2006) and Srinivasan (2006) indicated that a qualitative design provided the answers that I sought thus making this design appropriate. While this possibly could have been accomplished through a quantitative survey research design, I believed a better understanding of the intentions of the principal and the teachers' perceptions was achieved through the interview process. I sought in-depth responses from participants to better understand their experiences; responses that may not have been attainable through other means of research (Jackson et al., 2007; Roach & Kratochwill, 2004;

VanHorn, 2003). As described by Jackson et al. (2007) and Smith and Maika (2008), qualitative research allows the investigator the ability to ask open-ended questions in order to collect rich, thick, descriptive data; therefore clarifying the data.

Interviews

Initially, I conducted individual interviews with four elementary principals in a school district in the southeastern United States. I collected data related to the specific choices principals made in creating or maintaining the climate at their individual schools. Since interviews allowed me to gather more in-depth information, clarifying answers as they were given (Mitchell & Jolly, 2007), an individual interview method was chosen over the survey tool.

Once the principal interviews were completed, I conducted focus group interviews. These groups consisted of teachers from the schools of participating principals. Ideally, the groups would have been made of 5-7 teachers representing the various grade levels of the particular school. For consistency, teachers were limited to regular elementary education classroom teachers.

Other means of data collection were considered but were rejected. For example, interviewing coupled with a case study was considered. This method was rejected since a case study would have further limited the study exclusively to one school and not necessarily have provided more information that would have benefited the study. The focus group interviews, recognized in research as an alternative to traditional individual interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), and suggested for school climate research (Roach & Kratochwill, 2004; Jackson et al., 2007), allowed the me to involve more participants thus allowing for a broader spectrum of perceptions while still enabling an in-depth study.

While consideration was given to survey research, I determined focus group interviews to offer more detailed and in-depth information relevant to school climate. As noted by Kelle (2006), survey questions can be misinterpreted by the subjects thus creating false results. I took advantage of asking participants for clarification as needed (Mitchell & Jolly, 2007). Additionally, focus group interviews as a means of collecting data afforded me the opportunity to explore topics not originally anticipated (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

I considered the disadvantages of the focus group interviews as a means of data collection. One such disadvantage as pointed out by Marshall and Rossman (2006) is the ease with which the group might stray from the topic of interest. The interviewer, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006) must be skilled at facilitating group discussions and keeping the group on-task. This leads to the second disadvantage: the researcher actually has less control over the topics discussed, but the flow from one topic to another can provide the researcher with unintentional information (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Additionally, Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted that data collection can be difficult to understand during focus group interviews and the logistics of getting the group to agree on a meeting time and place can prove challenging. Finally, a major drawback of qualitative research, according to Jackson et al. (2007), is the obvious lack of generalizability since not many participants are included.

Despite acknowledged obstacles, focus group interviews were advantageous to this study for several reasons. Roach and Kratochwill (2004) viewed and Marshall and Rossman (2006) agreed that focus group interviews were a useful and cost effective means of quickly collecting large quantities of data. As an alternative to traditional interviews, focus group interviews lend themselves to a more relaxed environment allowing participants to share ideas with one another, reflect, and then respond to them thus creating richer dialogue (Marshall & Rossman, 2006;

McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Jackson et al., 2007). As participants reflect and respond, the researcher has the flexibility of considering unintended topics as they occur (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The conversation and flow of information bring a depth to the study that the researcher could possibly miss with the traditional interview or even case study.

Focus group interviews as a means of data collection allow the researcher to ask for clarification if needed (Mitchell & Jolly, 2007). In addition, the interviewer has the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the research topic as members of the focus group respond to one another's comments thus creating richer, more in-depth dialogue (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Although Mitchell and Jolly (2007) report that interviewing more than one person at a time might sway a participant's response, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) view this as an opportunity for deeper discussion of the topic. In fact, this method of qualitative research in contrast with the individual interview assumes that people form opinions as they interact with others (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Jackson et al., 2007). Marshall and Rossman (2006) clarify by adding that the basis of the qualitative interview is that the participants' views will unfold from an emic (participant) rather than etic (researcher) perspective.

Sources of information included the principals and the teachers of the selected schools. In qualitative research, frequently the study changes as new information is collected (Srinivasan, 2006). For example, although not originally part of the study, the assistant principal might have played a key role in determining the climate and therefore needed to become one of the sources of information. Perhaps in one of the schools I studied, the principal and assistant principal frequently collaborated to intentionally develop new ideas regarding maintaining a positive climate. The information collected from the assistant principal would then become vital to the study.

Strengthening the Study

Using a digital recording device as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2006) assisted in strengthening the study in two ways. First, the likelihood of using participant verbatim language or participant quotations increased when the interviews were mechanically recorded. Second, the device assisted me in using low-inference descriptions, another key component in qualitative design study according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006).

I employed member checking and participant review to strengthen the study. Member checking occurs when the researcher clarifies participant responses during the focus group interviews or in subsequent follow-up conversations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Jackson et al., 2007). Using participant review ensured that I accurately represented the participants' points of view. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) suggested the researcher allow the participants the opportunity to read the researcher's transcriptions and analyzed data, and make necessary corrections, additions, or deletions to guarantee accurate representation. I gave each participant the opportunity to clarify his or her responses and check for accuracy before the study was complete.

Adding to the trustworthiness of the study, I ensured audit trails were maintained as suggested by Jackson et al. (2007) and Wolf (2003). According to Wolf (2003), audit trails confirm the researcher's interpretation of the recorded raw data. They allow the researcher to show the processes the data have undergone by providing descriptions of the analysis and decisions made by the researcher regarding the findings (Wolf, 2003).

Finally, I enhanced the trustworthiness of the study by employing stepwise replication as suggested by Jackson et al. (2007). Stepwise replication is guaranteed when the researcher

follows an interview guide for every interview conducted. Interview guides for the principals and the teacher focus groups may be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

To summarize, this dissertation was a qualitative study of elementary school principal and teacher perceptions regarding the actions principals take to create or maintain a positive school climate. First, I purposively selected principals to individually interview. Next, I purposively selected teachers from within the participating schools to form focus groups to interview regarding their perceptions of the principals' actions.

Many strategies were put in place to create a trustworthy study. Based on recommendations from McMillan and Schumacher (2006) and Jackson et al. (2007), I digitally recorded the data, used participant verbatim language, member checking, participant review, audit trails, and stepwise replication to strengthen the study and add to its trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This qualitative study of elementary school climate had two purposes. The first part of the study involved purposefully selecting and interviewing elementary school principals to document their perceptions of what they did to create or maintain a positive climate in their school. Once principals were interviewed, those schools then became the venue for focus groups made up of teachers from within those schools. Based on responses from the principals during the initial interviews, I tried to discern the deliberate actions of the principals that maintained the school's positive climate. Additionally, I explored the perceptions of the teachers with respect to those actions. Guiding the research were the following questions:

- a) What intentional actions do elementary principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers?
- b) What are the elementary teachers' perceptions of the specific actions adopted by the principals to create or maintain a respectful school climate?
- c) To what extent are the perceptions aligned?
- d) Does the alignment differ across varying achievement levels?

Chapter 2 will review the literature regarding school climate. Found in this chapter are many of the varied definitions of and synonyms for school climate, the importance of studying school climate, the role of the principal in determining the climate of a school, and what the literature reveals about the perceptions of the teachers regarding the climate of the school.

School Climate Defined

Although a frequent topic of study, no single definition exists for school climate. In fact, researchers regularly interchange the term *school climate* with other terminology such as school learning environment, the environment of a school, school culture, the school social system, healthy climate, and the organizational climate of a school. Many agreed it is a vague concept, difficult to define (Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Dixon, Johnson, & Toman, 1991; Johnson, Dixon, & Edens, 1992; Hoy, 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Marshall, 2004; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Syvertsen, Flanagan, & Stout, 2009; Zullig et al., 2010). In a 1982 study, Anderson claimed that even though school climate had been studied for years from many different angles using a variety of variables, models, theories, and methodologies, it remained difficult to define. Dixon et al. (1991) agreed, stating that not only did school climate definitions vary, but also contradicted one another. Holdaway and Johnson (1993) concurred by adding that the definition was uncertain and nebulous. Finally, more recent research by Cohen et al. (2009) reinforced what previous studies indicated saying that the descriptions for school climate tended to be inconsistent and inaccurate as there was little agreement within the research regarding a clear definition for school climate.

In addition to a variety of definitions of school climate, research also exposed the myriad of elements that might be included in a study of the climate of a school. For example, Halpin and Croft (1963) suggested and Hoy et al. (2002) and March (2014) concurred, to some degree, that relationships between and among teachers, administrators, and students determined the climate of a school. However, in the 1978 study by Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, & Wisenbaker, academic norms, beliefs, and expectations were the key ingredients in explaining school climate. They also suggested that socio-economic status and race be included as factors of school climate.

Gunbayi (2007) related that climate was comprised of seven factors: organizational clarity and standards, team commitment, autonomy, intimacy and support, member conflict, rewards, and risks. Gottfredson et al. (2005) shared six components of their own: fairness of rules, clarity of rules, organizational focus with a common goal, staff morale, planning, and administrative leadership. Kelley et al. (2005) determined six different factors important to measuring school climate: communication, decision-making, innovation, advocacy, evaluation, and staff development. The communication factor was supported as an essential component to evaluate in a school climate study according to other researchers (Menon & Christou, 2002; Arlestig, 2007).

Adding to the list, Hoy (1990) purported that perceptions of behaviors helped to determine the climate of a school. Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Wolsey (2009) advocated that the physical building needed to be considered when ascertaining the climate of a school. While Fisher et al., (1986) agreed to some extent, they also felt work pressure, clarity of rules, and the degree to which innovations were encouraged and supported were components worthy of being included in defining school climate.

Still others insisted their research revealed that parent involvement was a component of school climate (Lubienski, Lubienski, & Crane, 2008; Wang, Berry, and Swearer, 2013). Barke, Hulgus, Schmidt, & Hough (2006) found that a school's population was a factor of school climate. One study pointed to a school-wide behavior intervention as a factor of school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Brookover, et al. (1978) defined school climate in terms of a school's academic norms, beliefs, and expectations. Cohen et al. (2009) claimed that most measures of school climate had not been scientifically developed and therefore resulted in an inaccurate depiction.

Anderson (1982) reasoned that school climate researchers did not agree on the definition, how it should be studied, or what instruments would be best to use. She concluded that it was possible that school climate researchers were not even researching similar topics. In 1999, however, Freiberg and Stein concluded that since the school's climate was continuously changing, a broad evolving concept of school climate was more realistic than a static definition.

During the 1960s, Halpin and Croft (1963) studied perceptions of elementary teachers and tried to conceptualize school climate. They described climate as the school's personality and placed it on a scale that ranged from opened to closed. Halpin and Croft (1963) explained that the more open a school's climate was the better. An open school climate, according to Halpin and Croft (1963), was one in which relationships were genuine and friendly. Included in the relationships were those between and among teachers and administrators. In their pioneer study, Halpin and Croft (1963) developed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) to measure the climate of a school. This survey targeted the perceptions of elementary school teachers. Hoy (1990) noted that researchers continued to use the Halpin and Croft (1963) questionnaire for decades as a framework and means to measure school climate.

In a 1990 study, Hoy proposed a difference in organizational school climate and organizational school culture. He discerned that organizational school climate related more to the perceptions of actions in the school whereas organizational school culture pertained more to shared beliefs or values of members of a school. He acknowledged the difference was minimal but meaningful. He used the terms *organizational school climate*, *school climate*, and *organizational climate* interchangeably. Hoy (1990) described school climate as a general term referring to the perceptions that teachers have regarding their overall work environment. He further explained that climate related to a collection of internal attributes that helped to

characterize a school. These attributes, according to Hoy (1990), also influenced the members' behaviors. Hoy (1990) suggested that the climate of a school is relatively long lasting and founded on the combined perceptions of actions in the school.

In a 2002 study, Hoy et al. described school climate as an overall concept that embodied the environment of the school. Hoy et al. (2002) explained that the administrators and teachers within a school experienced its climate and were affected by it in terms of their outlook on the work environment and the way they behaved in the school. A healthy school climate is one filled with positive relationships between teachers, administrators, and students (Hoy et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2013; Marsh, 2014). Hoy et al. (2002) contended that the teachers of a healthy school climate were confident in what they do, were confident in their students, and set high but achievable goals. They suggested that principals in a school with a healthy climate were positive, welcoming, and supportive while setting high standards for their teachers. Wynn et al. (2007) confirmed this concept as they indicated that a positive work environment was necessary for a healthy school climate. Students in a school with a healthy climate, according to Hoy et al. (2002), respected one another and valued education. Overall, Hoy et al. (2002) claimed that a school with a healthy climate was filled with people who had positive outlooks and good relationships.

Supporting the concept that positive relationships were an important aspect of a healthy school climate, Koth et al. (2008) described climate as a result of the social interactions found involving students and teachers. Similar to Hoy et al. (2002), Koth et al. (2008) and Kelley et al. (2005) also maintained that educational values were important to the climate of the school. Koth et al. (2008), however, veered from the idea that organizational school climate was an indicator of the actual climate. They believed the climate of individual classrooms within any given

school was a better measurement than overall school climate. Their study focused on students' perceptions rather than teachers' perceptions of school climate. Koth et al. (2008) suggested that school-wide initiatives did little to change students' perceptions of classroom climate. They concluded that multiple levels of the schools' climate should be investigated when trying to decide which initiatives might work best.

Halawah (2005) also suggested that schools were organizations that were multi-faceted but emphasized the importance of the principal in defining the climate of the school. While not offering an exact definition of school climate, Halawah (2005) proposed several key factors that should be considered in the definition such as the extent to which people felt safe and nurtured in the school, the likelihood of effective communication, and the degree to which values were shared. Researchers Menon and Christou (2002) also found communication as a necessary component to consider when studying school climate. Arlestig (2007) not only suggested that communication be a factor to contemplate in the study of a school's climate, but also maintained that it must be consistent and clear.

As Hoy (1990) concluded, the term *school climate* had become part of the normal vocabulary used in discussions regarding education and the effectiveness of schools. He continued that people use the term because they seem to have an instinctive sense of the meaning yet no one definition had been agreed upon by scholars. Hoy (1990) questioned the allure of the topic in spite of its ambiguity. He reasoned that individuals seemed to have an understanding of the meaning of school climate even if there was no consensus and that the concept of school climate was arguably one of the most important components of student achievement. Anderson (1982) advocated that the definition for school climate changed as each researcher consider which elements of climate were important. In a later study, Freiberg and Stein (1999) reasoned

that since a school's climate was always changing, it made sense that the definition changed as well. Welsh (2001) added to this suggesting that the climate was unique to each school and therefore measuring it should be unique to each school too. In the American School Counselors' Association, Hofstrand (2003) advised that the climate of a school, even if a definition were agreed upon, changes from one year to the next, thus making it difficult to study.

Importance of School Climate

Even though researchers have not agreed on a definitive meaning, the importance of school climate has not been diminished. Teacher morale, teacher retention, teacher performance, teacher satisfaction, student achievement, effective learning environments, lower levels of bullying, and overall school safety were among the topics that had been associated with the climate of the school (Brookover et al., 1978; Porter et al., 1989; Anderman et al., 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Freiburg & Stein, 1999; Menon & Christou, 2002; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Lumsden, 1998; Thomas, 1997; Cohen et al., 2009; Kiline, 2014; Wang et al., 2013).

School Climate and Teacher Morale

Morale, as maintained by Hoy (1990), and supported by Lumsden (1998) was a combined feeling that teachers had about their school and job related to satisfaction, excitement, friendliness, and pride. Teacher morale, described by Lumsden (1998), tended to be directly related to a healthy school environment and student achievement. Lumsden (1998) contended the principal contributed to teacher morale by creating or sustaining the school's climate. When the school's climate was perceived as positive, teacher morale was also higher.

Low levels of teacher morale can lead to lower productivity in teachers and decreased achievement in students (Freiberg and Stein, 1999; Lumsden, 1998). Low morale and feelings of

not being supported were reasons given for beginning teachers to leave the profession (Wynn et al., 2007). Lumsden (1998) suggested that one of the first steps in repairing low teacher morale was awareness. Principals first needed to be aware of the perceptions that teachers had regarding low morale in order to know that changes were necessary.

School Climate and Teacher Retention, Satisfaction, and Performance

Menon and Christou (2002) linked school climate to job satisfaction. They concluded that future teachers had preconceived ideas of what a school's climate should be but when hired and faced with the reality of the actual climate, the teachers were disillusioned and disappointed. Teachers who worked in a school where the climate was nurturing, supportive, and values were shared were more likely, according to Lumsden (1998), to continue to be motivated and enthusiastic about their profession. Likewise, Anderman et al. (1991) suggested that teachers who viewed their school's climate as positive were more committed to their job.

Halawah (2005) also indicated, and Kiline (2014) supported, a connection between school climate and teachers affirming that teachers' performance improved as the school's climate improved. Additionally, teachers who perceived the school's climate as positive also indicated a greater satisfaction with their profession (Anderman et al., 1991). Thomas (1997) indicated that typically, professionals connected work conditions with morale and commitment. Pretorius and DeVilliers (2009) confirmed this maintaining that the quality of teaching may be eroded if the climate of the school is poor.

School Climate and Teacher Stress

Climate was found to be one of the factors teachers identified as a cause of stress (Milstein et al., 1984). This study recognized several aspects of school climate as indicative of causing stress for teachers. Milstein et al. (1984) included, and Pahnos (2001) agreed, in part,

that shared decision-making, a feeling of belonging, supportive and effective supervision, clear and adequate communication, and behavioral limits placed on members of the organization as areas that potentially trigger stress levels in teachers to increase.

Pahnos (2001) added that teacher stress impacts the student learning environment negatively. Further, Pahnos (2001) stressed that principals play a vital role in lowering teacher stress levels in three ways: exploring their own reactions and perceptions of stress, creating a positive climate where teachers feel supported, and offering stress management or reduction programs for teachers.

Milner and Khoza (2008) reported findings of their study of four high schools in South Africa. While they recognized the importance of stress as it relates to various aspects of the school, as did Pahnos (2001) and Milstein et al. (1984), Milner and Khoza (2008) sought to compare stress levels of teachers in different schools with different student success rates. Although the four schools were similar in size, available resources, and curriculum, two of the schools reported high student success rates and the other two, low student success rates. Milner and Khoza (2008) theorized that by choosing schools similar in all areas except academic achievement, they could more easily and accurately compare the schools by eliminating variables. In their 2008 study, Milner and Khoza found teachers reported stress in all four schools but in schools where the teachers perceived the climate as positive, stress levels were lower.

School Climate, Effective Schools, and Student Achievement

In 1993, Holdaway and Johnson suggested that school climate ranked as the most important factor in the effectiveness of a school. This was confirmed in a study of Texas middle and high schools, when Johnson and Johnson (1996) reported school climate was undoubtedly

instrumental in an effective school. Kelley et al. (2005) reinforced this belief in their study saying that school climate was directly related to school effectiveness.

Student achievement has also been linked to the climate of a school in that a positive school climate typically indicated higher student achievement (Brookover et al., 1978; Hoy, 1990; Kelley et al., 2005; Chen, 2007). Although Koth et al. (2008) challenged this with the belief that individual classroom climate is the key to student success, a different 2008 study by Bradshaw et al. suggested that using a school-wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) plan will increase student achievement and positively affect the climate of the school. Marshall (2004) reported that a positive school climate can provide an opportunity for academic success. Kelley et al. (2005) also maintained that student achievement was directly influenced by the climate of the school. Related to student achievement, student commitment and participation in school sponsored activities was reported by Mehta et al. (2013) as decreased when a bullying climate was perceived by students.

School Climate and School Safety

While school safety had not been researched extensively in relation to school climate, some literature did exist to support the theory that schools with a positive climate might be linked to safer schools. Marshall (2004) reported that a positive school climate also assisted students in feeling safe at school. Also, the Council for Exceptional Children (2008) had confirmed this in a policy report they issued. Additionally, this was supported in a report from Cohen et al. (2009) and a study by Wang (2013) when they indicated that a positive school climate reduced violence in schools. Roberge (2011) also suggested that a positive school climate and a reduction in bullying were linked.

In line with Cohen et al. (2009) and Marshall (2004), Gottfredson et al. (2005) identified similar findings. In 2005, Gottfredson et al. reported results of their national study of school climate as a predictor of school disorder. The study was originally designed to include 1,287 schools nationwide but was eventually scaled down to 254 public, secondary schools. Teachers and students in middle and high schools completed a questionnaire with questions adapted from the Effective School Battery and What About You surveys, respectively.

The study produced a variety of findings. Gottfredson et al. (2005) found that minimal disorder existed between schools while a larger percentage of disorder occurred within the surveyed schools. Also, higher rates of disorder were found in schools with significantly more males than females, higher overall population, increased percentages of poverty, and schools with greater percentages of students and teachers who were African-American.

Although Gottfredson et al. (2005) reported that schools of any description encountered difficulties related to disorder, the climate of a school did influence the degree of that disorder. While the results could not guarantee a casual relationship between a higher positive school climate and lower instances of disorder, they affirmed that theory and prior research did.

Gottfredson et al. (2005) noted several observations resulting from their national study. They discovered a disconnect between principals' intentional actions, positive climate, and school disorder. Gottfredson et al. (2005) reported that most principals did not engage in activities directed toward increasing a positive school climate even though research supported that the activities would help to reduce school disorder. Identified strategies that enhanced a school's climate and reduced disorder included consensus of the school's community in establishing school rules, communicating expectations to the school community, enforcing the school rules with consistency, and encouraging behaviors with positive reinforcement. The

administrators, according to Gottfredson et al. (2005) should recognize the potential in the strategies and increase efforts to actively engage them in order to increase positive school climate and decrease school disorder.

In summary, in spite of the exploration through the years, researchers have not come to a consensus regarding the meaning of school climate (Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Dixon et al., 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993). Many researchers, however did agree that even without an established definition, school climate still played a vital role in many areas of the school community, affecting teacher morale, teacher retention, student achievement, effective learning environments, and school safety (Brookover et al., 1978; Porter et al., 1989; Anderman et al., 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Menon & Christou, 2002; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Lumsden, 1998; Thomas, 1997; Chen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2009; Kiline, 2014). Further, in their national study of school climate and school disorder, Gottfredson et al. (2005) found a gap between what is known to principals and what they actually do regarding increasing positive school climate and decreasing school disorder. This discrepancy ties into the question of this study regarding what principals say they do to increase school climate and how teachers perceive those actions.

Principals' Role in School Climate

According to Kelley et al. (2005) and Gulsen and Gulenay (2014), the principal played a key role in determining the climate of the school. The environment or climate of a school was first established by the principal and then spread throughout the school (Thomas, 1997). As maintained by Anderman et al. (1991), the principal defined the school's climate. This was supported in the 2011 study of Sahin who found the administrative leadership to be a predictor of the school's climate. In their study, Anderman et al. (1991) found different aspects of leadership

to be associated with different aspects of the school's climate. For example, the researchers found that principals who appeared to emphasize the instructional climate of a school were sometimes associated with a decreased concern on competition. Anderman et al. (1991) also suggested that principals who were viewed as successful in teacher supervision were connected to a school climate that emphasized teacher recognition, accomplishment, and affiliation.

Different styles of leadership were associated with different characteristics that may affect the school's climate. For example, Nir and Kranot (2006) studied several leadership styles and reported that transformational leaders were more inclined to create the types of climate that encouraged the kind of experiences that allowed for individual satisfaction therefore permitting personal teacher efficacy to develop. They reported a direct link between principal leadership styles and many aspects of teachers' jobs. For instance, they described a high correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and the quality of teaching. Further, Nir and Kranot (2006) explained that a high correlation existed between teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction. They cautioned that job satisfaction could not be a blanketed assumption since it was based on individual experiences. They related principal leadership styles to teachers' experiences, efforts, commitment to change, autonomy, professional development, stress, and overall satisfaction summarizing that all of these aspects were linked to personal teacher efficacy. Nir and Kranot (2006) concluded that teachers' job satisfaction was the mediating factor in the relationship between principal leadership styles and personal teacher efficacy. They further surmised that the transformational leader was more likely to support teachers in several ways thus increasing overall job satisfaction. Anderman et al. (1991) also supported the importance of teacher job satisfaction suggesting that when the teachers were not satisfied at their work, both the teachers and the students were affected.

The transformational leader, according to Lontos (1992), made a point of visiting and helping in every classroom each day. He or she made it possible for teachers to visit each other's rooms as well. Lontos (1992) reported that the transformational leader involved the entire staff in developing the vision statement, goals, and beliefs for the school at the beginning of the year. This was similar to the invitational leader who tried to create a school climate that encouraged every member of the school to encounter success (Egley & Jones, 2005). Lontos (1992) also suggested that the transformational leader assisted teachers to work efficiently by finding alternative interpretations to issues; to see individual problems in terms of the greater perspective of the entire school population; to search for different solutions rather than resting on preconceived answers; and to help the group remain on task without asserting his or her own views. Power was shared when the transformational leader was in charge, stated Lontos (1992). In other words, the transformational leader allowed for teams of teachers to take responsibility in decisions that will improve the school. In 1998, Lumsden purported that administrators who acted in ways that empowered teachers, such as allowing them to be part of the decision-making process, helped to increase teacher morale. Lumsden (1998) believed teachers who had a sense of empowerment were inclined to have higher morale.

A transformational leader, based on Lontos' (1992) research, made public the good things that teachers did privately. Likewise, he or she took the time to write a private note to teachers showing appreciation and gratitude for a job well done. Additionally, Lontos (1992) claimed that the transformational leader surveyed the members of the staff, listened actively, and allowed teachers to experiment with innovative ideas. Teacher morale grew stronger, according to Lumsden (1998) when the principal actively supported his or her teachers. Lontos (1992) reported the transformational leader would even go so far as to help teachers research and

present new ideas at conferences. She also contended that this leader actively sought professional development opportunities for the staff to include presenting workshops him or herself. When hiring, according to Lontos (1992), the transformational leader explained his or her expectations of involvement and shared decision-making, and hired teachers who were willing to commit to such collaboration.

Effective communication was the link between principals and a positive school climate, based on Halawah's 2005 study, which was supported by Arlestig (2007). Halawah (2005) offered several reasons for the existence of the link, to include aspects of school safety, student discipline, and teacher collaboration. To clarify, Halawah (2005) contended that open, two-way communication kept faculty and staff, to include the administrators, abreast of concerns such as safety issues that could then be addressed, monitored, and controlled instead of being allowed to fester and cause more problems.

The importance of effective communication was supported by a study conducted by Arlestig (2007) in which she claimed that communication was not only an important process in schools but that leadership was nonexistent without it. She contended that school improvement and academic results depended on effective communication. Arlestig (2007) asserted that communication was a deliberate action of leaders, necessary to demonstrate concern of employees' needs as well as build culture within the organization. In her study, Arlestig (2007) observed a school in which communication efforts were vast. Arlestig (2007) explained that principals held a twenty minute meeting at the beginning of each week, grade level teams met weekly, team leaders met with principals weekly, and principals met with teachers individually throughout the year. As indicated by Arlestig (2007), the school also had numerous alternative means of communication: Web site, e-mail, a weekly newsletter, and memos as necessary to

keep everyone informed. In spite of the varied methods of communication, teachers in this study felt more support was needed. They voiced concerns over a lack of two-way verbal communication where their questions, suggestions, and concerns could be heard. Because of these concerns, Arlestig (2007) offered that written communication needed to be supported by effective two-way communication. In addition, in this study, although principal communication was viewed as effective, the teachers perceived that there were other areas in need of improvement such as more frequent classroom observations and more overall principal visibility. In conclusion, Arlestig's (2007) study emphasized the importance of communication but maintained that conscious and deliberate actions by the leaders of the school were of equal importance.

Although Gallmeier (1992) did not find one leadership style more effective than any other did in motivating teachers, he did conclude that the principal was the single most important person involved in creating an effective school. Kelley et al. (2005) contended that the leadership behaviors were the driving force behind shaping a positive learning environment, positive teacher attitudes, and student achievement. According to Kelley et al. (2005), the principal needed to correctly envision the potential needs and then help others to share and apply that vision. They further stated that the principal should be able to accurately determine his or her leadership style and understand the impact it has on the staff. Nir and Kranot (2006) purported that the leadership style was not the key issue, similar to Gallmeier's (1992) findings, but Nir and Kranot (2006) suggested that the typical behaviors of a transformational leader most likely led to an environment conducive to overall job satisfaction.

According to research based on Arlestig (2007), Bass (1985), Egley and Jones (2005), Halawah (2005), and Lontos (1992), and in agreement with Kelley et al. (2005), effective

leadership required the principal to be aware of and then carry out specific behaviors to establish and maintain an effective and successful school. As Hoy (1990) emphasized, school climate had become known as a factor in effective schools and improved student achievement.

The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) was one initiative principals had embraced that research has found effective in creating or maintaining a positive school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, & Young, 2011). PBIS, according to Bradshaw et al. (2008), was a strategy used to change the school's environment by improving systems such as discipline and data collection and management. Additionally, Bradshaw et al. (2008) purported PBIS assisted in improving procedures that would ultimately support a positive transformation in behaviors of both the staff and the students. The research team reported that staff training in PBIS seemed to increase friendliness and create a more positive atmosphere. They also indicated that principal participation in the training and implementation of the program were mandatory but that no particular leadership styles were found better or worse in helping to create the positive climate.

Another initiative noted for improving the climate of a school with the addition of reducing bullying, was the implementation of restorative practice (Grossi, 2012). This initiative was introduced in four Brazilian schools ranging from first to seventh grades where bullying had been an on-going problem. The practice involved inviting all stakeholders to participate in restorative circles to reduce conflict. Results of the study also indicated a more positive school climate in schools participating in restorative practices.

Teachers' Perceptions

Even though research determined that the principal was the key to the school's climate (Kelley et al., 2005), the teachers must perceive the principal's actions as positive in order for the

actions to be effective (Pashiardis et al., 2005; Rhodes et al., 2009). The study conducted by Pashiardis et al. (2005) in Portugal of secondary teachers tried to determine the degree to which teacher perceptions of their principals matched the principal's view of himself with respect to effectiveness. They found that there was a correlation. According to Pashiardis et al. (2005) and supported by Rhodes et al. (2009), the difference in the actions of the principals and the perceptions of the teachers could be detrimental to the school and the student body. Pashiardis et al. (2005) pointed out, however, that in Portugal, the teachers of a particular school elected the principal from a pool of teachers. After serving for three years, the teachers had the option of re-electing the principal if the principal agreed. This team of researchers noted that the principals in the Portuguese schools were very much aware of what the teachers thought of them. Rhodes' et al. (2009) study supported Pashiardis' et al. (2005) findings indicating the importance of principals being aware of teachers' perceptions in order to create or maintain a positive school climate.

In their study of 2005, Kelley et al. revealed that teachers often had different perceptions of their principals and the climate of the school, yet teachers were unwilling to share this information with their principals thus preventing potential growth or change. Contrary to the Kelley et al. (2005) study, Pashiardis et al. (2005) found that the principal's and the teachers' perceptions usually matched. Differences in the studies account for some of the discrepancies.

Pashiardis et al. (2005) conducted their study in a secondary school in Portugal where 10th, 11th, and 12th grades were optional for students and the principal was elected by his or her peers to serve a three-year term. The teachers, therefore, saw the principal, as a peer rather than an authority. Additionally, since the principal was elected, it was to his professional gain to lead

through consensus rather than a top-down management style and to stay keenly aware of teachers' perceptions.

Kelley et al. (2005) conducted their study of small elementary schools in rural America where, traditionally, the principal is hired by executives in a central office and where teachers have little say in the hiring practices. This study, similar to Pashiardis et al. (2005), sought to examine perceptions of teachers and principals. While Pashiardis et al. (2005) found matching perceptions in most cases, Kelley et al. (2005) found the perceptions did not match. Kelley et al. (2005) asserted that when the teachers' needs were met, their perceptions more closely resembled those of the principal. When, however, teachers' needs were not being met, perceptions did not match. Further, if the teachers had suggestions that were unfavorable toward the principal, but nonetheless potentially helpful, teachers were unlikely to offer them to the principal. Obviously, in this study (Kelley et al., 2005), teachers did not see their principal as a peer but as an authority figure. Since the principal was not elected by his peers nor did his retaining his position depend on their input, the desire or pressure to be aware of teachers' perceptions was not as great as in the Pashiardis et al. (2005) study.

Teachers' perceptions of the school climate influenced their decisions regarding staying in or leaving the profession (Wynn et al., 2007; Dagli, 2012). Working conditions was one aspect of school climate studied by Wynn et al. (2007). They found that teachers were more likely to remain in a school district as their perceptions of the working conditions improved. As they evaluated teacher perceptions of principal leadership, Wynn et al. (2007) discovered that the likelihood of teachers remaining in a school district also increased with their satisfaction of principal leadership. More research was suggested by Wynn et al. (2007) to identify the specific actions taken by principals who most successfully encouraged teacher retention.

Teachers who perceived a positive school climate have been connected to students with higher achievement (Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Tubbs & Garner, 2008). According to Johnson and Stevens (2006), schools with a positive climate also boasted a high percentage of teachers involved in school-wide decision-making, an innovative environment, a helpful and friendly student-body, and sufficient resources and facilities. They admitted that even though their findings supported the notion that a positive school climate led to greater student achievement, that the opposite might also be true: student success led to a more positive school climate. In a later study conducted by Johnson et al. (2007), researchers suggested a qualitative approach using interviews and observation to help assess teachers' perceptions of school climate.

Nir and Kranot (2006) found that while the transformational leadership style might be an important factor in creating a positive school climate, the most essential components were positive work experiences and teachers' perceptions. While Kelley et al. (2005) suggested that the role of the principal was critical to the school climate, they also acknowledged that principals rated their schools with a higher positive school climate than the teachers of the same schools. This discrepancy, according to Kelley et al. (2005), pointed directly to the importance of the teachers' perceptions of school climate. Kelley et al. (2005) conceded that the principals in their study might have self-reported differently than their actual behavior. Still, according to Kelley et al. (2005), the perceptions of the teachers were critical to the way they felt about school climate. Kelley et al. (2005) suggested that being aware of the teachers' perceptions, might help principals to make decisions that were more informed and to assist them in creating a more positive school climate. Rhodes et al. (2009) supported this indicating that when teachers believed their needs were being met, they also perceived a more positive school climate.

Summary

Overall, research showed clear evidence that the climate of schools was worth studying (Brookover et al., 1978; Porter et al., 1989; Anderman et al., 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Menon & Christou, 2002; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Lumsden, 1998; Thomas, 1997; Cohen et al., 2009). Even though the definition of school climate remained vague (Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Dixon et al., 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993), many researchers agreed that the importance of the concept overrode the lacking consensus of meaning (Anderson, 1982; Hoy, 1990; Hofstrand, 2003). Researchers indicated that school climate influenced teacher morale (Lumsden, 1998; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Anderman et al., 1991; Thomas, 1997), teacher performance (Halawah, 2005; Pretorius & DeVilliers, 2009), teachers' stress level (Milstein et al., 1984), student achievement (Brookover, et al., 1978; Hoy, 1990; Kelley et al., 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Marshall, 2004), teacher retention (Wynn et al., 2007; Anderman et al., 1991), the learning environment (Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Kelley et al., 2005), and school safety (Marshall, 2004; Council for Exceptional Children, 2008; Cohen et al., 2009; Mehta, 2013; Wang, 2013). With so much resting on the climate of a school, it is essential that researchers continue to investigate the topic.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The goal of this study was twofold: to report what elementary school principals perceived that they do to create or maintain a positive climate in their schools and to examine the teachers' perceptions of those efforts. First, I interviewed purposively selected elementary school principals to discern what they believe was important and what they were intentionally doing to establish and maintain a positive school climate. With a better understanding of the beliefs and actions of the principals who have created or maintained a positive school climate, perhaps others will model their actions and establish a positive climate in their own schools.

Second, I explored the perceptions of the teachers in the participating elementary schools. Hoy et al. (2002) found that principals frequently rated the climate of their school higher than did their teachers indicating a difference in perceptions. Thus, it was important that all of the voices were heard and recognized. This study allowed the principals and the teachers an opportunity to share their perceptions of what intentional administrative actions were necessary to build a positive school climate.

This section addresses the specific purpose of the study, the general questions guiding the study, and a detailed description of the study including interview questions. Additionally, the methods for collecting and analyzing data, the role of the researcher, and the rigor and limitations of the study are described.

Purpose

Clearly stating the purpose of the study is essential in qualitative research as it helps to focus the study (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). The first purpose of this study was to interview purposefully selected elementary school principals to document their

perceptions of the deliberate actions they took to establish or maintain a positive school climate. The second purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of the teachers within the participating schools with regard to what the principal did to establish or maintain the climate.

Research Questions

The following general questions served as a guide in the research:

- a) What intentional actions do elementary school principals say they take to promote a positive school climate for their teachers?
- b) What are the elementary school teachers' perceptions of the specific actions taken by the principals to create a positive school climate?
- c) To what extent are the perceptions aligned?
- d) Does the alignment differ across varying achievement levels?

Population and Sample

The population for the study was elementary school principals and teachers. After consent from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district, four elementary school principals and teachers within the approved district were purposefully selected to participate in the study. One elementary school from each of the four corridors of the district was selected to assure equal representation of the geographic areas and populations. Of those four schools, two were chosen to represent schools of higher academic achievement and two of lower academic achievement based on posted and available information from the Department of Education. Once the principals were selected, I then assembled regular education classroom teachers from within the participating schools to form focus groups. Ideally, each focus group would have included five to seven participants who were from the same schools as the selected principals.

Interview questions for elementary school principals and teachers focus groups may be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

First, I electronically sent a letter to four purposefully selected elementary principals within one approved district to describe the study and elicit volunteer participants who were interviewed. I followed-up the electronic letters with a telephone call to encourage participation and answer any questions. One principal from each of the district's four corridors was purposefully chosen to represent geographical areas and populations of the district. After gaining the principals' permission, I then electronically sent a letter to all of the regular classroom elementary teachers from within the participating schools to explain the study and seek volunteer participants to be included in a focus group. The focus groups consisted of teachers who were from the same schools as the participating principals and who were purposefully selected to represent each grade level from within that school.

Schools were purposefully selected. As described by McMillan (2004) purposive sampling is frequently used in qualitative research designs. In purposive or purposeful sampling, the researcher chooses the subjects based on knowledge of the population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The objective, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) is to select, in the researcher's judgment, those participants who will provide the most useful information for the study.

Some advantages of purposive sampling, based on McMillan and Schumacher (2006), are that it requires less time and money, allows for generalizing to similar circumstances, and assures the acquisition of necessary information. It is also important to be aware of disadvantages associated with purposeful sampling. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) point out weaknesses of

this type of sampling that include realizing the results of the study are dependent on characteristics specific to the sample, generalizability is limited to similar subjects, and that subject or researcher bias increases the chance of error. With noted disadvantages of purposive sampling, I determined this sampling method still proved most beneficial to the study by providing the information necessary.

I employed an interview guide (Appendices A & B) to facilitate discussion and to collect data. The questions of the interview guide were informed by themes that were prevalent in the literature (See Appendices C & D). The interview guide assured that the study used stepwise replication thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the collected data since the same questions were asked in the same order with each interview (Jackson et al., 2007). The principal interview guide consisted of three demographic questions, six open-ended questions, and one scale question. While the teachers' interview guide was similar, a few differences existed. The teachers' guide was composed of three demographic questions, seven open-ended, and two scale questions. The questions served as a guide but probing questions were used to clarify during the interviews (Mitchell & Jolly, 2007).

I conducted interviews on school grounds in locations where the participants were most comfortable. Interviewing participants in the most natural setting is one aspect of prolonged and persistent fieldwork found in qualitative studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Cheseboro & Borisoff, 2007). Frequently, according to Cheseboro and Borisoff (2007), the participants chose the time and place of the interviews in qualitative research.

Interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participants. Digitally recording the interviews assured accurate representation of the participants' statements therefore increasing the study's validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In keeping with McMillan and

Schumacher's (2006) suggestion to assure participants' confidentiality and anonymity, I provided a consent form (Appendices E and F) for each participant to sign. All interviews were transcribed and participants were offered a copy of the transcription. Each participant was given the opportunity to make any necessary changes or additions to the original interview. By allowing participants to read the transcribed interview and make any changes or additions, I employed participant review, a method necessary in qualitative design to assist in validating the findings (Jackson et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In the transcription process, all names and locations were changed to comply with the confidentiality agreement.

In addition to participant review, member checking was available to participants. Member checking refers to giving the interpretations of the data back to the participants for them to check for accuracy (Jackson et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This technique, according to Jackson et al. (2007) and McMillan and Schumacher (2006), strengthens the validity of the study by assuring that the researcher's interpretations of the findings match the participants' intended meanings.

Inductive Data Analysis

By allowing patterns to appear from the data, I utilized inductive data analysis rather than imposing categories before the collection process (Frankel & Devers, 2000; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Sogunro, 2001; & Lund, 2005). McMillan and Schumacher (2006) described inductive analysis as a process qualitative researchers use that allows themes to emerge during their research and then arrange those themes accordingly. Analysis of the data should not be done separately from the process of data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Sogunro, 2001; McMillan, 2004). Additionally, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) offer two purposes of interim analysis: to help the researcher make decisions regarding data collection and to help the

researcher note repeating topics. Srinivasan (2006) concurred with this adding that data collection continues in qualitative research until a saturation point has been met.

After transcribing two or three interviews, I, with help from computer software such as NVivo, began to look for patterns that might have been present, thus employing interim analysis. This discovery analysis technique included written observer comments throughout the transcribed interviews as I read and studied the transcriptions. Additionally, I noted any insider information that might have influenced the interpretation of the data.

Researcher Role

The role of the researcher was mixed in this study. Generally, the role was that of the interviewer. I had no previous administrative experience and therefore could not relate completely to the role of a principal. I had not participated as a principal in developing a school's climate.

Since, however, I had been a teacher and a school counselor within the selected district, some reflection and disclosure as an insider-interviewer was necessary. In addition, since I had worked in two of the selected schools where the study took place, and knew and worked with some of the participants, reflection, disclosure, and observer comments were crucial to the study.

At the time of the study, I had 28 years of experience in the public school system. I had worked in eight different elementary schools and had 14 different principals and 15 assistant principals that I could remember.

In my first school, I believed the climate was perfect and so was the principal. I was new, and maybe everything is always perfect the first few years. It was not until about the fourth school I was in that I began to notice the attitudes of the teachers and wonder why many of them seemed so negative. It was during the next several years that I really looked at the climate of the

schools in which I worked. Sometimes, it seemed that the principal did all he or she could do to support the teachers and still, it was not enough. Other times, it seemed that the principal did not care if the climate were positive or negative as long as the teachers and support employees did their jobs.

What made a climate positive or negative? What were the principals doing that teachers appreciated? Or was what they did all wrong according to the teachers? I remembered in one school, the principal decided that for fun we would all go on a scavenger hunt on a teacher workday. The principal saw this as a way to build teams and camaraderie; most of the teachers saw it as a waste of their time. Several principals would give us early release passes or passes for jeans days or candy surprises in our mailboxes. Although it probably seemed like a good idea, most teachers collected stacks of the early release passes because they could never finish enough work early enough so that they could leave 25 minutes early. I did not own any jeans, so the jeans passes were not motivating for me personally. Since many faculty members stayed on diets throughout the year, candy was not seen as a motivator by many and it was just tossed into either the trash or someone else's mailbox. So what were the principals of schools with a positive climate doing that teachers perceived as positive?

Even though the principals believed that what they were doing was motivating and beneficial in increasing the positive climate, I unofficially concluded that the teachers' perceptions were what really mattered. It was during this realization that I knew I wanted to formally study those perceptions. My hope was that principals might benefit from this study in realizing that the teachers' perceptions are important and that listening, not just assuming, is key. Further, I hope that elementary principals might be able to benefit from some of the shared ideas of the interviewed principals and teachers.

Limitations and Rigor of the Study

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) declared that qualitative research was found credible when the investigator has provided ample evidence of validity, reflexivity, and components needed to extend the findings. To that end, I employed the following strategies supported by McMillan and Schumacher (2006) and Creswell and Miller (2000) to enhance validity: participant verbatim language, reflexivity, mechanically recorded data, member checking and peer reviewers.

I used direct quotations and the language of the participants when phrasing the interviews. This technique of capturing colloquialisms and quotations within the narrative is referred to as *participant verbatim language* and is an essential component to establishing validity according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006).

I used reflexivity, or “rigorous self-scrutiny” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) throughout the interviewing, coding, and analyzing portions of the study. The disclosure of the insider-interview was further evidence of this practice. The mechanically recorded data technique aided in the reflexivity enhancement.

As suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000), to enhance and ensure credibility and reliability of the study, I utilized member checking and participants offered copies of the transcribed interview. Member checking, according to Jackson et al. (2007) and McMillan and Schumacher (2006), occurs as participants (members) are asked to read the interpreted data to check for accuracy. Additionally, I used thick description throughout the narrative as Creswell and Miller (2000) advised. Lastly, based on Creswell and Miller’s (2000) recommendation, I utilized peer reviewers to confirm the emerging patterns that I perceived. Peer reviewers, according to Creswell and Miller (2000), are others who did not participate in the study but have

knowledge of the subject and can offer constructive and educated comments regarding the interpretations and analysis of the data.

The study had several limitations resulting from the methodology. The interview and focus group designs that I chose restricted the generalizability of the study. The interview and focus group designs were chosen because they allowed for a greater and deeper understanding of the principals' actions and how the teachers perceived those actions, but at the same time, narrowed the study to just the few participating schools, the selected administrators, and teachers. It was possible that the number of teachers willing to participate limited the study as well. Further, it was likely to conclude that the principals limited the study since it was possible that only those confident in their school's climate agreed to participate. Generalizability will have to be determined by the reader, as suggested by McMillan (2004), as he or she applies it to individual situations.

The study was also limited by the insider-interviewer role of the researcher. While I will tried to maintain an objective view of the data collected, prior history with the participants and their schools possibly tainted some of the findings.

The limitations of the study, while significant, did not completely invalidate the study. I anticipated that the participants offered differing experiences, perceptions, and ideas involving the climate of their schools. Since the focus was on the positive aspects of school climate, perhaps others will glean some new information with respect to creating a positive climate in their own schools.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Research clearly indicates the importance of a positive school climate for teachers (Brookover et al., 1978; Porter et al., 1989; Anderman et al., 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Menon & Christou, 2002; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Lumsden, 1998; Thomas, 1997; Cohen et al., 2009). A positive school climate promotes a variety of beneficial outcomes such as higher student achievement (Brookover et al., 1978; Hoy, 1990; Kelley et al., 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Marshall, 2004), better teacher morale (Lumsden, 1998; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Anderman et al., 1991; Thomas, 1997), more effective learning environments (Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Kelley et al., 2005), and lower school disorder and crime rates (Marshall, 2004; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2009). Research, however, has not addressed what the elementary school principals believed they did to create a positive school climate and how the teachers perceived those efforts.

The purpose of this study was to determine what actions elementary school principals adopted to create or maintain a positive climate for their teachers while investigating teachers' perceptions of those actions. The following general questions served as a guide for the study:

- a) What intentional actions do elementary principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers?
- b) What are the elementary teachers' perceptions of the specific actions adopted by the principals to create a positive school climate?
- c) To what extent are the perceptions aligned?
- d) Does the alignment differ across varying achievement levels?

The findings of the four individual and four focus group interviews are presented in narrative form in this chapter. School demographics, participant demographics, and a brief explanation of the data analysis are presented for informational purposes. The remainder of the chapter presents the findings as answers to the general research questions that guided the study. Themes and subthemes are discussed within each general question heading where appropriate.

School and Participant Demographics

Four elementary schools were purposefully selected as sites to select participants for the study, one from each of the four corridors of the district, to assure equal representation of the geographic areas and population. All four participating schools were from the same mid-size, suburban Virginia school division. Serving approximately 19,400 students in grades pre-K through 12, all of the division's schools were fully accredited by the Virginia Department of Education. The student ethnicity of the division was mostly White at 82% of the population, 9.5% African-American, 3.5% Hispanic, and the remaining 5% were either American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or of two or more races. Figure 1 represents the division demographics.

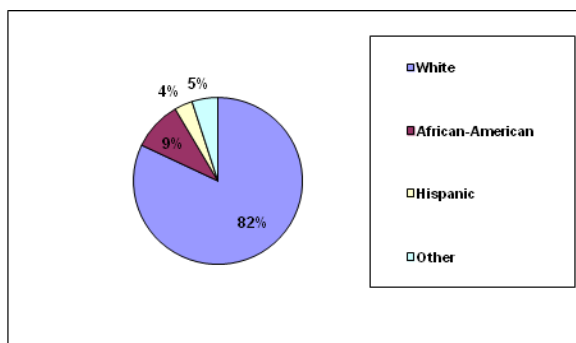


Figure 1. Demographics of the school division

After receiving consent from the Internal Review Board and the school district, four elementary school principals and general education classroom teachers within the approved district were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Once principals agreed to participate, general education teachers from each of the participating schools were asked to volunteer. It was anticipated that one teacher from each grade level would join the focus group of his or her school. One elementary school from each of the four corridors of the district was chosen to assure equal representation of the geographic areas and population.

The first school, with an approximate population of 400, was home to 20 general education classroom teachers. The ethnicity of the student population in kindergarten through fifth grade was as follows: 90% White, 7% African-American, 2% Hispanic, and the remaining 1% either American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or of two or more races. Figure 2 demonstrates the demographics of school one. State standardized testing results indicated 86% of the students passed the English test, 69% passed in Math, 86% passed in History, and 93% passed in Science. Figure 3 describes the state standards of learning test results.

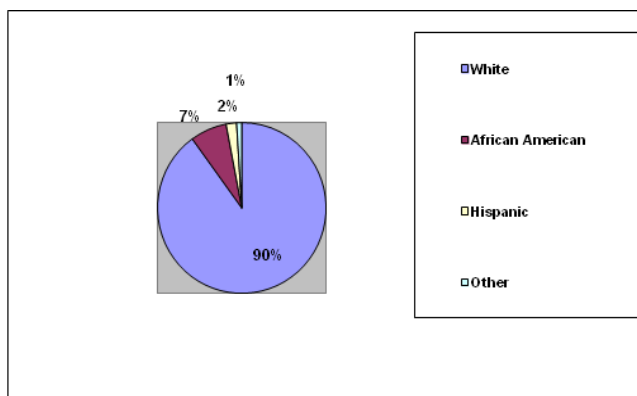


Figure 2. Demographics of school one

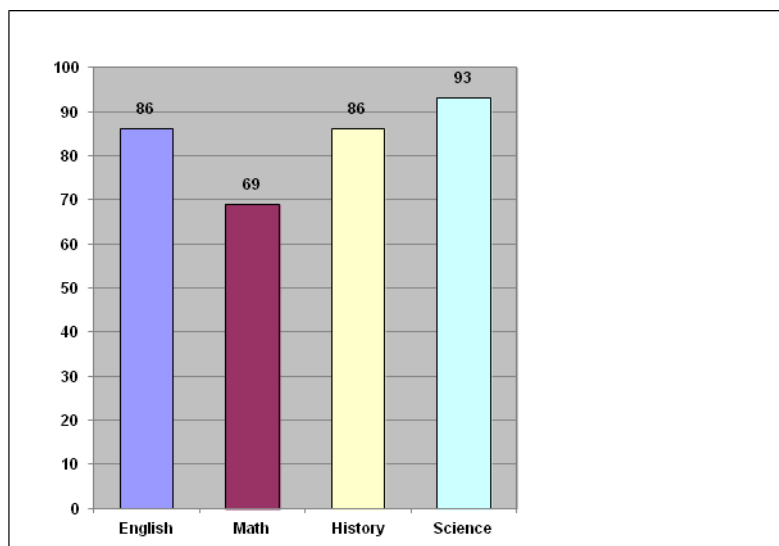


Figure 3. State standardized test results for school one

The current principal, P1, indicated he had served at the school for three years and had been a principal in a different district for five years prior. Five teachers from the first school participated in the focus group. All general education teachers in this school looped with their classes. Looping was a term used to describe the educational practice of an entire class staying with the same teacher for two or more years. Teacher T1A, with the most teaching experience of this focus group, had taught for 32 years, all of which were in the same school. Her experience included all elementary grades K-5. The second teacher in this school, T1B, indicated she had taught for three years in grades four and five. Teacher T1C was a beginner teacher with two years of teaching experience. She taught grades four and five. The fourth teacher, T1D, reported having taught for 27 years. She had experience in preschool as well as kindergarten and first grade. The fifth teacher, T1E, of this focus group had taught for eight years. Her experience included grades second and third.

The second school, with a student population of approximately 580, employed 26 general education classroom teachers. The ethnic profile of this school was as follows: 86% White, 8% African American, 2% Hispanic, and the remaining 4% either American Indian/Alaskan Native,

Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or of two or more races. Figure 4 represents the demographics for school two. The state standardized testing results showed 95% of the students passed the English test, 90% passed the Math test, 95% passed in History, and 95% passed in Science. Figure 5 demonstrates the state standards of learning test results for school two.

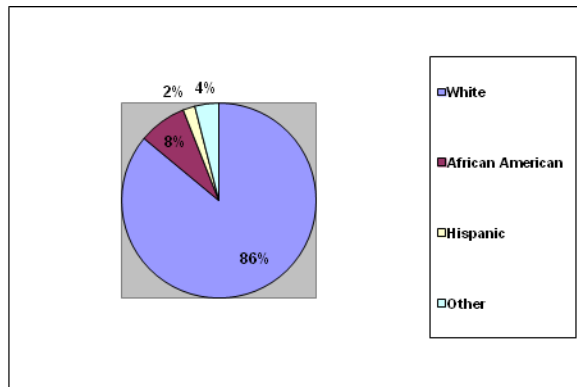


Figure 4. Demographics of school two

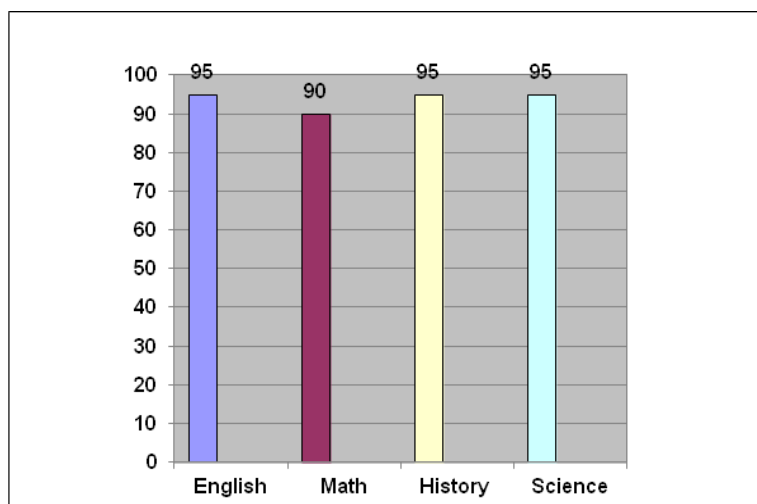


Figure 5. State standardized test results for school two

The principal of the second school, P2, had served in this position for eight and one-half years and had previously been the assistant principal at the same school. Prior to administrative work, P2 had classroom experience that included kindergarten, middle school, and high school.

After the principal forwarded numerous electronic notices to the faculty asking for participants, two teachers volunteered to participate in the study. The first teacher, T2A, had 30 years of experience that included preschool, but the majority had been in kindergarten. The second teacher, T2B, had 16 years of experience in second and third grades. While both teachers had previously taught at other schools, both had also been at this school for 14 years.

The third school selected had a population of approximately 540 students and employed 26 general education classroom teachers. The ethnicity of the student population within this school was as follows: 88% White, 8% African American, 3% Asian, and the remaining 1% Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or of two or more races. Figure 6 represents the demographics for school three. State standardized tests showed 88% of the students passing in English, 71% passing in Math, 87% passing in History, and 88% passing in Science. Figure 7 demonstrates the results of the state standardized testing for school three.

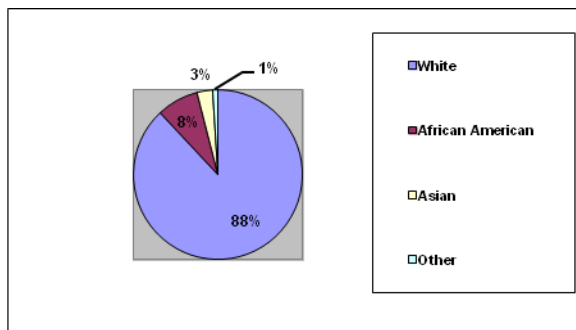


Figure 6. Demographics of school three

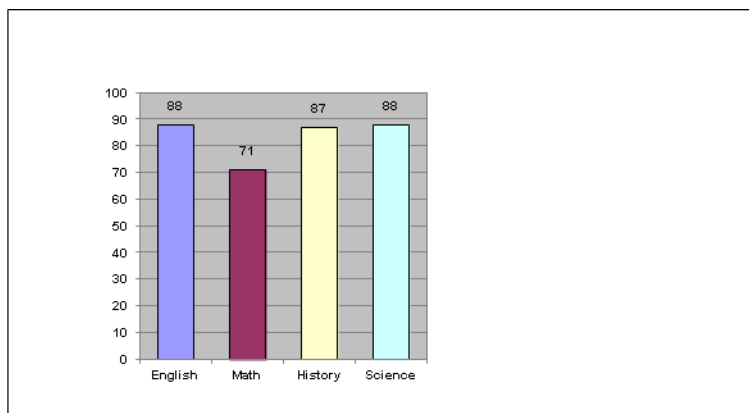


Figure 7. State standardized test results for school three

In the third school, the current principal, P3, reported serving for five years as the principal. She also had been the assistant principal at this school prior to her appointment as principal. Her 11 years of teaching experience included general education in grades first, second, third, and fourth. Three teachers volunteered to participate in this school's focus group. The first teacher, T3A, had 22 years of classroom teaching experience. The second teacher, T3B, had three years of experience. Teacher T3C had 15 years of general education classroom experience.

The fourth school selected to participate had a population of approximately 620 students and employed 29 general education classroom teachers. This school's student population included 76% White, 13% African American, 4% Hispanic, 4.5% of two or more races, 2% Asian, and the remaining .5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, with 0% Native Hawaiian. Figure 8 represents the demographics for school four. State standardized test scores reported 92% of the students passed in English, 76% passed in Math, 92% passed in History, and 94% passed in Science. Figure 9 demonstrates the results of the state standardized testing for school four.

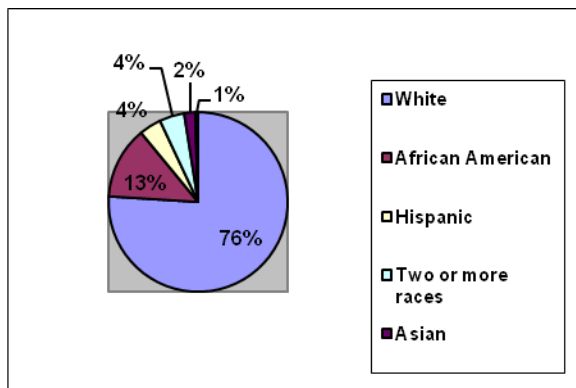


Figure 8. Demographics of school four

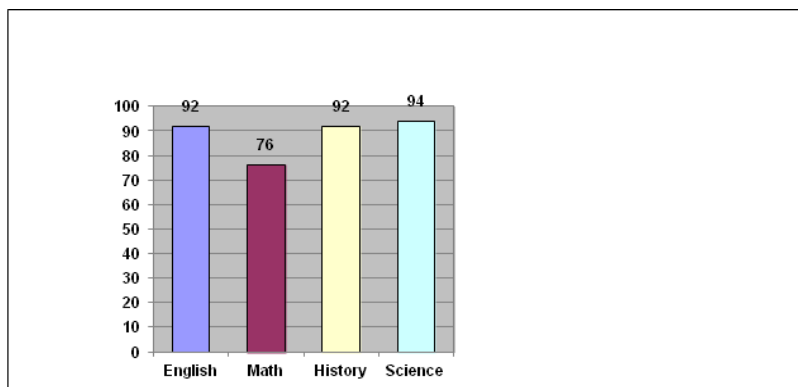


Figure 9. State standardized test results for school four

The principal of this school had served in that position for eight years. She had also served as the assistant principal in this same school. Prior to her administrative appointments, P4 had nine years of general education classroom experience in kindergarten and first grade. She had also served as a principal in a different school district for one year.

In this school, five teachers volunteered to participate. The first teacher, T4A, taught for seven years with experience in grades four and five. For the last five years, T4A had taught single gender classes that had looped from fourth to fifth grade. Teacher T4B had 11 years of experience. She indicated having taught in kindergarten, first, and second grades and was currently teaching second grade. The third teacher, T4C, had taught for eight years. While

currently teaching third grade, she also had experience teaching second grade. The fourth teacher of the fourth school, T4D, had the most experience of this focus group with 16 years. She had taught eight years in preschool and was currently teaching her eighth year of kindergarten. Although teacher T4E had experience in special education with students in grades kindergarten through fifth, he had also taught general education in grades three, four, and five was currently teaching fifth grade.

Table 1 shows a summary of the school demographics. Included are the number of students and teachers per school and the ethnic breakdown of the student population. In school four, the breakdown of the American Indian, Asian, Hawaiian, and two or more races was significantly more than the other three schools and warranted further explanation. Additionally, the table indicates the summary of the standards of learning test results as reported by the state department of education. It should be noted that the second school had the highest overall scores, followed by schools four, three, and one.

Table 1

School Demographics

| | School 1 | School 2 | School 3 | School 4 |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number of Students | 400 | 580 | 540 | 620 |
| Number of Teachers | 20 | 26 | 26 | 29 |
| White | 90% | 86% | 88% | 76% |
| African American | 7% | 8% | 8% | 13% |
| Hispanic | 2% | 2% | 3% | 4% |
| American Indian | 1% | 4% | 1% | .5% |
| Asian | | | | 2% |
| Hawaiian | | | | 0% |
| 2 or more races | | | | 2.5% |
| | | | | |
| English SOL scores | 86% | 95% | 88% | 92% |
| Math SOL scores | 69% | 90% | 71% | 76% |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| History SOL scores | 86% | 95% | 87% | 92% |
| Science SOL scores | 93% | 95% | 88% | 94% |

Table 2 and Table 3 indicate the summary of the demographics collected for the participants of the study. Table 2 explains the principal demographics while Table 3 is dedicated to the teacher demographics.

Table 2

Participating Principal Demographics

| Principal | Gender | Years as principal at current school | Served as assistant principal in current school? |
|-------------|--------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Principal 1 | Male | 3 | No |
| Principal 2 | Female | 8 ½ | Yes |
| Principal 3 | Female | 5 | Yes |
| Principal 4 | Female | 8 | Yes |

Table 3

Participating Teacher Demographics

| Teacher | Gender | Years of Experience |
|---------|--------|---------------------|
| T1A | Female | 32 |
| T1B | Female | 3 |
| T1C | Female | 2 |
| T1D | Female | 27 |

| | | |
|---------|--------|---------------------|
| T1E | Female | 8 |
| T2A | Female | 30 |
| T2B | Female | 16 |
| T3A | Female | 22 |
| Teacher | Gender | Years of Experience |
| T3B | Female | 3 |
| T3C | Female | 15 |
| T4A | Male | 7 |
| T4B | Female | 11 |
| T4C | Female | 8 |
| T4D | Female | 16 |
| T4E | Male | 14 |

Data Analysis

Four individual principal interviews were digitally recorded. In each case, principals chose their office as the most comfortable and convenient location to conduct the interview. Focus group interviews, which were similarly digitally recorded, were also conducted on school grounds in a quiet location away from the office to maintain participant anonymity.

After establishing a positive rapport between participants and researcher, an interview guide (Appendixes A and B) was used for each interview. The interview guide allowed for structure and consistency among the eight interviews while also permitting participants to answer honestly to open-ended questions. Probing questions, also included in the interview guide, were

available if needed for clarification. Member checking was utilized during and after each interview as summaries of participants' responses were offered. Participant review to assist in validating responses was also employed as each participant was offered a copy of the transcribed interview and allowed to make changes or additions as needed. This assured that the researcher's interpretations of the findings matched the intended meanings of the participants.

During the initial analysis, the qualitative computer software program NVivo was used. Discovery analysis was used and included written observer comments throughout the transcribed interviews as the transcriptions were carefully reviewed. The coding system emerged during this analysis and included five main themes with subthemes. Table 4 displays the five main themes and respective subthemes.

Table 4

Themes and Subthemes

| Theme | Subtheme |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Defining Climate | |
| Principal Leadership Style | |
| Previous Principals' Actions | |
| Creating a Positive School Climate | Rewards |
| | Recognition |
| | Traditions |
| Improving the School Climate | Rating the School's Climate |
| | Principal Visibility |
| | Principal Support |
| | Relationship Building and Communication |

What Intentional Actions Do Elementary Principals Adopt to Promote a Positive School Climate for Their Teachers?

Defining Climate

Before discussing the actual climate of individual schools or the intentional actions principals adopt, all participants were given the opportunity to define what *climate* meant in their own words. It was important for participants to know and understand the shared meaning of *climate* to be certain all were commenting on the same topic. Following is a description of participant responses, comparing and contrasting meanings and components they included in defining *climate*. Although no two responses were identical, they were similar in meaning.

The principals defined *climate* as an overall mood or feel, or the environment of a school. They agreed that it could be positive or negative and included attitudes and perceptions of faculty, staff, students, and parents. A wide variety of responses was given to describe components that made up the climate of a school. The principal of the third school felt strongly that the physical appearance of the school was important to the school's climate and stated:

I think the newer the building, they perceive it to be more of a clean environment and you would be surprised at the productivity that you would see...What's perceived as a clean sink that is 25 years old and it may be clean but because it is 25 years old, it appears or perceived to be dirty. That, believe it or not, affects climate.

Principals agreed that feeling valued, appreciated, and recognized were important components making up the school climate. A feeling of support by administrators was determined to be important by one of the principals. P3 indicated, "...we continuously work to recognize others..." P3 explained they recognized faculty and staff members in faculty meetings and in a weekly newsletter that circulated exclusively to faculty and staff. P4 also felt support

and a feeling of being valued were important components of school climate. She explained that in a school with a positive climate, "...staff members (are) enjoying their job, feeling supported, and feeling appreciated." The principal of the first school suggested working together should be included in the components of the school climate and state, "the ability of everyone being able to work together and feeling like they're part of a team..." Attitudes of teachers and administrators were noted by principals as components of climate as well as how the administrators lead. Interviewed principals also discussed in conjunction with attitudes of teachers and administrators that people enjoying what they do and wanting to go to work as important components of the climate of a school.

Teachers used similar vocabulary to define *climate*. They suggested it was an overall feeling, mood, atmosphere, and the comfort level one experienced when entering the school building. They included the way teachers, administrators, students, and visitors felt once inside the building. Similar to P3, several teachers of the first focus group discussed that the way a building actually appeared helped to determine the climate. T1E was the first of her focus group to include the climate. T1A then agreed and stated, "I was thinking when (T1E) said, 'physical space,' I was thinking, 'cleanliness.' I also think of that as part of the climate and color and student work." T1A later added that the lighting inside the school contributed to the climate of the school. While P3 thought the physical appearance of the school was important and the teachers of the first school state similar opinions, the teachers of the third school did not share this perception.

Teachers did concur with the principals in that they determined that feeling valued, appreciated, and recognized were important components that made up the school climate. Two of the teacher focus groups indicated a feeling of administrative support was necessary for a

positive school climate. T4C state, “Whether or not you feel like you are supported, and feeling appreciated...by administrators and colleagues too.” T4B also thought:

That you feel what you are doing is meaningful. It is not just something you’re doing just because it is another thing you have to do. It has an effect on the students and it has an effect on the people you work with.

T3A added, “I think part of it is the way the staff is treated, the responsibilities we have, the way our administration views our opinions, the kind of pressure we are put under, and the help that we receive.”

Adding to the components that made up a school’s climate, teachers included the comfort level of teachers asking for assistance from other teachers and administrators. Both teachers and principals agreed that working together as a staff was a component of climate, but teachers also included the interactions of teachers among other teachers, of teachers among administrators, of teachers among children, and of children among children. T1D agreed saying, “I think part of it is the interaction that you see going on between the children in the classrooms, between the children and the teachers, and between the staff members.”

Responses specific to the teacher focus groups included the way the staff was treated and the responsibilities the teachers had. Responses particular to the principals consisted of trust, communication, and peoples’ perceptions.

Principal Leadership Styles

Principals are in a unique position to set the tone or create the climate in an elementary school (Barth, 1986; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Cohen et al., 2009). The principal’s leadership style may play an important role in helping to determine the climate of his or her school (Bossert et

al., 1982; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Egle & Jones, 2005; Nir & Kranot, 2006; Moolenaar et al., 2010; Sahin, 2011). Different characteristics associated with those leadership styles may be linked to the climate of the school. For example, in a top-down management style, the administrator gives directions to faculty and staff members and then expects the employees to carry out the instructions. In a top-down management style, the principal does not consult faculty and staff members nor consider their opinions. The principal may be viewed as more authoritarian. In a shared-decision making management style, the leader actively seeks and incorporates the ideas of staff and faculty. The principal may be seen as more collaborative. All four of the principals interviewed for this study answered with confidence and without hesitation.

All four of the principals described their leadership style as either collaborative or shared decision-making. P1 described his leadership style as “shared leadership.” He empowered the teachers by sharing information and then giving teachers a chance to come up with their own ideas. In reference to making school wide decisions, P1 claimed

I usually go about that by bringing them (the faculty) in and sharing whatever information that has caused me to think this way or whatever. Giving them a chance to come up with other ideas, then seeing what the most feasible idea is.

Similarly, both P2 and P3 indicated that they present the data to the teachers and allow them to develop their own plans for improvement. P2 described her leadership style as “very collaborative” and maintained that, except for decisions regarding the safety of students and staff, she asked for faculty input. For example, she explained:

I find that if you present it to the teachers and let them come up with the conclusions on their own, there is more ownership on it. Rather than me say, ‘Our third grade scores were low and so third grade you need to do x, y, and z,’ I just provide it in a broken down

fashion and they will come up with their own ideas and solutions and often be more critical of themselves than I would ever be. And probably come up with better ideas and strategies than if I just told them things to do.

P2 gave several more examples of faculty sharing in the decision making process such as purchasing Smart Boards and deciding when to offer after school activities. Regarding the purchasing of Smart Boards for classroom teachers, P2 explained to the teachers the limited budget they had and that the Smart Boards would have to be purchased a few each year. She then allowed teachers to decide who would get Smart Boards during which school years. She indicated that teachers collaboratively made those decisions. According to P2, teachers were more satisfied with the plan they devised than if she had dictated who would get the Smart Boards first. The after school activities came up for discussion when teachers asked P2 if certain activities could be moved to different months of the school year. She presented this idea to the faculty and allowed them to revise the activity schedule. She summarized by adding, “Especially anything and everything instructional and academic I always take the time to include (the faculty) and ask them, ‘Where are we going to go?’”

P3 also described her leadership style as “very collaborative.” Her leadership style was, according to her, characterized by “being in the trenches” alongside the teachers and, as a “life long learner,” participating in professional development opportunities with the faculty. Although she reserved the right to make decisions to balance the school’s budget, she asked for input from teachers before making other decisions. P3 illustrated with a hypothetical example regarding low standardized test scores:

I would most definitely use a comparison of where we are according to other schools, where we are according to the district, and then I would ask their opinions of what are we

already doing? What are some things that we could do better? How can we work together as a team?

She also referenced a survey that she used, rather than making those decisions on her own, to determine which teachers wanted Smart Boards in their rooms.

P4 described her leadership style as “people person relationship builder” and “approachable.” She indicated that “95% of decisions are brought to the staff” and then she sought consensus before making decisions.

To summarize, the principals all believed their leadership styles were best described as shared or collaborative. Shared or collaborative leadership styles allowed for faculty and staff to be part of the decision making process. The principals gave examples to support their claims and felt confident about their answers.

Previous Principals’ Actions

All four of the interviewed principals had teaching experience prior to their administrative appointments and were able to recall their experiences as teachers under the direction of previous principals. Some of the principals’ recollections were positive in nature while other principals described negative memories. Following is a narrative description of the participating principals’ thoughts regarding their experiences as teachers and their perceptions of what their previous administrators had done to promote a positive school climate.

The interviewed principals recalled their favorite principals as one who valued teachers’ opinions, trusted teachers, and empowered teachers by allowing them to be part of the decision-making process. P2, who was teaching during the junior high to middle school concept transition, felt that her principal promoted teamwork and school wide decision making in an effort to pull teachers together and improve the school’s climate. P1 recalled when his principal

asked the faculty for help with the school's budget. He described a feeling of empowerment and a beginning to understanding the importance of prioritizing because "some things can be bought and some things can't." This understanding and empowerment helped P1 not only to see "the big picture," but also to influence his future career. He explained, "It was actually what made me start thinking of becoming a principal."

P3 and P4 recalled their favorite principals as supportive and trusting of their staff. P3 stated, "They (the administration) trusted me. I didn't feel micromanaged and they felt that I had earned the right to be the teacher or the leader in my classroom." P4 described a supportive principal who maintained an open-door policy. She felt that he promoted a positive relationship with his teachers who in turn felt comfortable asking for help when they needed it.

P2 and P4 acknowledged that their principal allowed for and encouraged common planning time for teachers. The common planning time was helpful as a time-saver in that each teacher did not have to create lessons individually. Common planning time also allowed for collaboration and team building within the grade level. Common planning time was a practice whereby teachers of the same grade level met as a group to plan lessons, events, and activities as well as to share concerns and exchange ideas.

In the district of the study, common planning time was sometimes difficult for teachers of the same grade level since they were responsible for their students nearly the entire day. Principals, who created the schedules, had to be willing to do so with the specific intention of allowing for common planning time. This meant that all teachers of a particular grade level must have been without students at the same time. Typically, students were in a resource class such as library, art, music, or physical education. A problem occurred in scheduling common planning time when there were more classes at a particular grade level than there were resources. Creative

scheduling was then required; principals must have been dedicated to the concept of common planning time for the process to be successful.

P1 acknowledged that his most admired principal was a “teacher at heart and was very sensitive to the job of a teacher.” He described the principal as happy, fun, and approachable. He joked around with his faculty and liked to laugh. He also encouraged his faculty and staff to socialize and get to know each other not just on a professional level, but on an emotional level as well. The faculty, P1 continued, “wanted to do a really good job for him because we liked him.” This sentiment was echoed in P4’s description of her principal. She stated:

(He supported) us if we were having a problem (and) his door was always open. But he was also very professional and set high expectations for us as well which we really wanted to meet because he was so great to work with and we didn’t want to let him down.

P4 further described her favorite principal as “very social, very much a people person.” He took time to get to know his faculty on a personal level to include teachers’ families.

P2 recalled the principal she admired most as one who acknowledged hard work with praise, special treats placed in teachers’ mailboxes, or school wide spirit days. He tried to include the entire school community to maintain a positive school climate. P2 explained that, although the principal she had in mind did not usually seek faculty feedback regarding his efforts to promote a positive school climate, he did ask for community responses regarding various school activities.

Much like P2, P3 also recalled her favorite principal acknowledging teachers’ efforts with Jeans Passes, the Golden Apple Award, and shout outs in in-house memorandums. As a teacher, P3 was keenly aware of body language and professed:

I will say when I walked by an administrator as a teacher and they didn't smile at me or didn't recognize me or they didn't say, 'Good morning,' or, 'Hello,' I immediately started second guessing myself as if I had done something wrong, upset a parent, or maybe was misinterpreted somehow or some way.

P3 admitted that, "Not a lot of my leaders that I worked under did a lot to recognize (teachers). So I learned from the lack thereof..."

P1 and P4 both indicated that their favorite principals made every attempt to be visible throughout the school during the day, taking time frequently to visit classrooms. In fact, P4 remembered her principal "showed us that he cared about how we were doing by visiting our room every day." Both P1 and P4 recalled that the principals they admired the most welcomed and sought feedback from teachers through both surveys and the open-door policy they maintained. Contrary to this, P2 and P3 admitted that, while their former principals may have offered a survey to the teachers, for the most part, did not seek teacher feedback regarding their efforts to create a positive climate.

In summary, favorite principals of P1 and P4 were people-oriented, shared decision-making leaders. Both P1 and P4 wanted to please their administrator because they respected and liked him. An open-door policy was important to and employed by both of the favorite administrators. P1 and P4 shared that their favorite principals trusted their teachers and empowered them by giving them meaningful responsibilities. P1 and P4 both felt valued and heard by their former administrators.

P2 recalled her former principal as one who offered frequent incentives and notes to teachers who had worked hard. P3 recalled similar actions about her former administrators but also stated that they were lacking in recognizing teachers for their efforts. Neither P2 nor P3

recalled worthwhile and consistent attempts made by their former administrators to collect feedback from the faculty and staff regarding the school's climates or the principals' efforts to promote a positive school climate.

Creating a Positive School Climate

According to research (Kelley et al., 2005; Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014), the principals' actions and decisions regarding the development or maintenance of the schools' climate were essential. The principals were in a unique position as the leading administrators to determine what was necessary to develop a positive climate in the schools. In describing principal actions intended to create a positive school climate for teachers, the following sub-themes emerged: rewards, recognition, traditions, support, and principal traits. Following is a description of each along with the summary of findings from the principal interviews.

Rewards.

A reward in the elementary school setting was designed to honor a teacher for doing something above and beyond the day-to-day duties of teaching. In the district where the study took place, teachers were generally not rewarded with comp time or time that compensates them for working late or for attending meetings after school hours such as Parent Teacher Association meetings or Parent Teacher Conference nights. Other rewards, such as monetary bonuses that might be found in a business setting, were also not available to reward teachers. Principals did, however, reward teachers in other ways. Trying to find the balance of rewards that motivated teachers yet still fit into the school's budget constraints, led principals to become creative in their rewards.

Principal responses were divided when asked, "What do you do to create a positive climate for teachers?" Two of the principals, P2 and P3, described rewards such as "Spirit

Days,” “Jeans Passes,” or “Leave Early Passes.” P1 and P4 did not include the passes when interviewed, but teachers of those schools indicated they were used. Spirit Days were described as school days when the principal encouraged the entire school staff and faculty to wear school colors and permitted them to wear jeans to school. Spirit Days were usually granted on Fridays, before a holiday, during state standards of learning testing, or the last few days of the school year. Jeans Passes were passes given to individual teachers or sometimes entire grade levels as a reward for a job well done, for staying late at school for a specific evening event such as a parent workshop or a math night, or contributing to a district wide charity. Teachers turned in a Jeans Pass on any day they wanted to wear jeans. P2 also indicated she left small treats, usually candy in teachers’ mailboxes as a token reward for working hard.

The principals in schools two and three believed their faculty valued the Jeans Passes, Spirit Days, Leave Early Passes, and special treats left in their mailboxes. P2 maintained, “Sprit Days are free and they (faculty) love them, probably as much as food, and that costs money.” Through a principal-initiated teacher survey, P3 had confirmed that her faculty members enjoyed the rewards and incentives she gave to teachers. P3 disclosed, “That (the survey) is how I gauge the temperature as to, ‘Do they want another one?’ This year we did the Gift of Time twice because it was very well-received.” The Gift of Time, as P3 described, was neither a reward nor recognition, but as the name implied, a gift to help teachers:

So, our assistant principal and I took kindergarten...all of kindergarten, first, and second grade for an hour. We took them in the cafeteria and we did a whole hour of enrichment with reading and language arts. In that hour, kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers could spend it however they deemed appropriate.

Recognition.

Recognition differed from rewards in that a reward was usually a tangible object such as a pass to wear jeans or leave early, meant to honor someone, or meant as an incentive to encourage participation in an event. Recognition, on the other hand, was meant more as praise for task completion that was superior in some way to the expectation. Recognition might have come from the principal in written or verbal form and might have been announced in a public forum such as a faculty meeting or presented privately to an individual teacher. Recognition might also have been encouraged by the principal, but actually have been given directly from a colleague, as was the case with the Coke and a Compliment.

All four of the principals indicated recognition as one way they promoted a positive school climate for teachers. P3 and P4 both used a Golden Apple Award. This recognition was passed on from one teacher to another during a faculty meeting. The teacher who currently had the Golden Apple recognized another teacher for going “above and beyond,” as P4 stated, and handed the apple to that teacher. The Golden Apple gave recognition to one teacher during each faculty meeting.

P4 and P3 also used the Coke and a Compliment as a means of recognizing accomplishments. The principal purchased several Cokes and placed them on a counter for all to see. Anyone was allowed to give one of the Cokes along with a compliment to anyone else on staff. P4 encouraged her teachers to recognize teachers who were not on the same grade level. P1 and P2 both shared that they celebrated “good things” that were happening either individually or by grade level. P3 extended faculty recognition to include acknowledgement of the Teacher of the Year in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) newsletter and PTA meeting. P3 also gave “shout outs” in the weekly in-house newsletter and during daily morning announcements. In this case, teachers were publicly recognized by the principal for carrying out his or her expected

duties in an exemplary fashion or for embracing an additional responsibility not required such as volunteering to spearhead the canned food drive or mitten collection for people in need.

While P3's recognition method was more for all to see, P2 tended to keep recognition on a more personal level. She described her attempts to promote a positive climate as:

So, anything that I think is going to easily promote them in that way...I write notes. (I tell them) how much I appreciate (them). I send emails... little thank you notes. (I put chocolates in their mailboxes (which are) little tokens to show (my appreciation). Or, if I have had someone that didn't have a great day, something to validate that, but then to also acknowledge successes.

Traditions.

Examples of shared, repeated experiences or traditions was another theme that emerged in the individual and focus group interviews as a way the principals tried to develop or maintain a positive school climate. Some of the traditions were already in place and were continued when the current principal was appointed, while others became traditions because of the incoming administration.

Several traditions intended to create a positive school climate for teachers were described by the principals of all four schools. P1 began each day by shaking the hand of every student as he or she entered the building. While P3 did not indicate shaking every student's hand, she did encourage hand shaking and eye contact from students and tried to call each student by name. P3 and P1 both enjoyed cooking for their faculty members and have celebrated teachers with either cookouts during lunch or omelets for breakfast. P3 described:

I have barbecued for them and made hamburgers and hotdogs during lunch. So, they drop off their children and they come out and it will be me and maybe six dads and our

DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) officer, where I get grills together and we will give them hamburgers or hot dogs. Just a special lunch.

P3 also invited a food truck to the school's campus and allowed teachers to place orders for lunch. Although the school's budget did not allow her to pay for the teachers' lunches, teacher participation showed P3 that her faculty enjoyed the opportunity.

Encouraging socialization was another tradition the principals indicated that they planned for the teachers. P1 invited teachers to bring food to faculty meetings thus transforming them into "Snackalty Meetings" where food and fellowship occurred prior to business. P4 planned social events for her faculty after school hours so that teachers could get to know each other's family members. P3 invited families to come to school to share in major recognitions such as Teacher of the Year.

P1 felt that personally greeting each student was a tradition that helped promote a positive school climate. He explained:

We start every day with a handshake out front. Every child gets it...I expect them to look in our eyes and have a positive start to the day and we tell them this is a one second opportunity to honor each other and show each other you are important and so we are going to do that every day.

P1 believed the climate of the school trickled down from him to the teachers and to the students. Respecting each other was, in his mind, a tradition necessary for a positive school climate. Part of respecting each other was also imbedded in the tradition of Round Table Discussions at the first school. These Round Table Discussions were based on the premise that everyone's opinion should be heard and valued. Teachers and administrators sat around a table and tossed out ideas

that were open for discussion but no one person was responsible for leading the group or the discussions. P1 explained:

...we just have candid discussions about (the topic) where...I usually try to listen. I don't say too much because I don't want to sound defensive if it is something being complained about. But, it has also been great for them to hear each other's ideas.

Other traditions that were unique to the first school involved a guitar. P1 enjoyed playing the guitar and singing songs to his faculty members. One particularly fun tradition, according to P1, was to sing Happy Birthday to every staff member. He did this "in usually embarrassing ways" depending on the teacher's sense of humor. He also enjoyed singing during faculty meetings.

P1 also included a Turkey Hunt and an Easter Egg Hunt as traditions used to promote a positive school climate. The Turkey Hunt, as detailed by P1, involved paper cutouts of turkeys that he hid when faculty members were out of the building. Each paper turkey corresponded to a prize. When teachers located the turkeys, they could redeem them for the prize indicated. Similarly, the Easter Egg Hunt involved the principal, or in some cases, parent volunteers, hiding the eggs either inside or outside the building depending on the weather conditions. Each egg contained a prize that belonged to the teacher who found the egg. Prizes ranged from candy, Jeans Passes, and Leave Early Passes to coupons for a percentage off of merchandise or a free meal donated by a local business partner.

P2 described traditions such as the Easter Egg Hunt, but also included evening activities for families and teachers such as Health and Fitness Night and Science Night. Health and Fitness Night was an evening to which parents and students were invited to participate in various activities designed to increase one's health and fitness. Science Night was an evening to which

students and parents were invited to participate in hands-on science activities. The evening might also showcase science fair displays. Teachers were encouraged to attend these events as well. She indicated that teachers came up with the ideas and she believed:

if you make a safe, inviting place in a nonacademic setting, then the families feel more comfortable to come in. If there are any academic concerns or behavior concerns (about the student) or whatever else, because you have built that relationship at a different level, (addressing difficult topics is easier).

Other traditions at this school included Pajama Day when the entire school was invited to wear pajamas to school, and Crazy Hair Day when everyone was invited to have a unique hairstyle. The principal also described other traditions such as Mix-Matched Socks Day when everyone was invited to wear socks that did not match, Twin Day when everyone was invited to dress like someone else, and Pink Day when faculty, staff, and students were encouraged to wear pink clothing.

Improving the School Climate

As the discussion turned toward rating their schools, describing a perfect climate, and making suggestions for improving the school climate, principals shared a variety of ideas. Since none of the participants was 100% satisfied with the climate of his or her school and none of the participants considered his or her school perfect in terms of the climate, there was predictably room for improvement in all of the schools. The question of how to improve the climate temporarily stymied several of the participants.

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

Principals were asked to rate their school's climate on a scale of one to five with five being the perfect school climate. Principal perceptions of their specific school's climate varied from school to school. Following is a narrative account of their perceptions.

All of the principals gave their schools average to high-average scores when asked how close their schools were to having a perfect climate on a scale of one to five with five being perfect. Fifty percent of the principals rated their school's climate as four and 50% rated it as three to three and one-half, as noted in Figure 10.

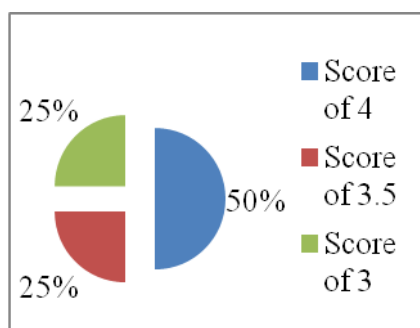


Figure 10. Results of principals' perfect climate scaled question

Perhaps in justifying their responses, several principals offered statements regarding the rating they gave their school's climate. P1 and P4 acknowledged that their respective staff members worked well together. "I think we all work beautifully together and everybody respects one another," stated P1. P4 echoed this in his comment, "...we have a really warm staff. They work really well together for the most part." P1 admitted there would always be challenges to face such as transfers, deaths, and conflicts among staff members. P4 concurred saying "I just think there are outlying conditions with class sizes being bigger and more to do with less money in the budget...I can't fix that." Both P2 and P3 identified a low staff turnover as evidence that

their school's climate was positive. P2 further noted the district's survey also indicated a positive climate and said, "About 99% of (the survey) is positive comments."

P1 believed his school had a positive climate and ranked it at three, but acknowledged there was "always room for improvement." He questioned if a school's climate could ever be perfect, but felt as if he could strive for that. He described the perfect climate as:

The parts I am talking about the perfect school, that intrinsic motivation where the climate is that we are here to learn and that is it, and we can't wait to do it. That would be amazing, you know. I don't know if you could ever get there, but you get as close as you can.

When asked about a perfect climate, P2 responded:

Well, I would like to say first of all, I don't think that the perfect school climate is realistic or possible. I wish I could say that was a goal. I just don't find that it is realistic because trying to keep (everyone) happy on any given second of a day is near impossible. Still, she did describe a perfect climate as one where the school was welcoming and inviting and the office staff was responsive, staff members were good listeners, and teachers understood their students. P2 continued:

So, I feel like in general, we are all in this together. I call us a family including the community. Hopefully, that equates to an average climate, maybe. Never a perfect climate because I don't think anyone can achieve that.

She rated her school as a four on the scale of one to five saying, "We are good, but there is always room for improvement."

P3 concurred with P2 in that she believed a perfect climate was not attainable because, "I am not going to make one-hundred percent of the people happy." She clarified saying that

although not everyone would be happy, in a perfect school climate, the majority of the people would be. She pointed to her low teacher turnover rate as an indicator that the teachers were happy. She described a perfect climate as, “I would think that children would be smiling and people would again be very positive. Their attitude would be positive. It (the school) would be very bright. I think that student work would be displayed everywhere...” P3 confidently rated her school’s climate as four on a scale of one to five.

P4 did not dispute the reality of a perfect climate, but revealed that in a school with a perfect climate, as a minimum, there would be a shared “vision of what’s important for kids.” Like P3, P4 pointed to her low staff turnover rate as an indicator of a positive climate. She explained that when she was appointed as principal of this school, she had previously served as the assistant principal for several years and therefore, had already established strong relationships and a degree of trust with the faculty. P4 indicated that meeting the basic needs of the teachers was important to the perfect school climate. Teachers needed to have the necessary materials to educate students as well as “providing them the support that they need just gives them the ability to do their job and not worry about anything else.” P4 claimed that in addition to a certain level of trust and strong relationships, helping teachers to feel comfortable was important to the climate of a school. Giving teachers what they needed in order for them to get the job done was part of her overall plan to help teachers feel comfortable. On the scale of one to five, P4 rated her school as three and one-half.

Principal visibility.

Visibility of the principals emerged as one way to promote a positive school climate. To clarify, in the district where the study was conducted, visibility might include principals engaging in conversations with students in the hallways, cafeteria, and briefly in the classrooms

provided instruction was not interrupted. Principals might have simply asked a student how his or her day was going. They might also have asked a student in the classroom to explain a particular activity. In addition to interacting with students throughout the day in a variety of locations throughout the school building, the mere presence of an administrator might have sent an important message to students that the principal was aware of student behaviors.

According to the interviewed principals, increased visibility of the principal would make a positive difference in the schools' climate. Acknowledging this, but also recognizing the time constraints she had, P4 stated:

...it can be very hard because my door is always open. That also means that it is also open to parents and everybody else that walks through the door, so it is hard to get into every classroom every day. I have not mastered that, but it is something that I can improve upon...

Other principals agreed that, while they comprehended the importance of their presence throughout the school and in the classrooms, the other requirements of their position made it difficult to get out of their offices and be visible. Similar to P4, P1 also claimed an open door policy. He said about visibility, "I try and get into the classrooms because that is where I love to be anyway. The job doesn't always afford that opportunity, but when it does, I like to be out there." Contrary, P2 did not mention visibility as a means of improving the school's climate, but she did say she was already available for parents and visible during evening activities. P3 believed she was already visible and worked alongside the teachers "in the trenches."

In summary, three of the four principals acknowledged the necessity for visibility and realized that being in the halls, cafeteria, and in the classrooms would help to promote a positive school climate. One principal, P2, did not mention visibility as a means to promote a positive

school climate. Two principals, P1 and P4 felt they could be more visible and one principal, P3, felt she was already visible during the school day.

Principal support.

Another significant recommendation for improving school climate that emerged was support for classroom teachers. Although the participating principals and teachers agreed that more support was necessary, there was little consistency regarding the type of support that was most beneficial. Support had different meanings for each individual and ranged from simply listening to someone vent about frustrations to having a discussion regarding instruction and curriculum to actually helping the teachers in the classroom.

One example of support that two principals referenced was visibility. Even though visibility was perceived as one way to improve the school's climate, it was also viewed as a type of support. Visibility as a means of improving the school's climate was interpreted as the principal being seen by students and teachers in the hallways, cafeteria, and classrooms during the day. Visibility as it relates to support was interpreted as the principal's presence in the classroom and the principal physically helping the teacher with the educational process.

P4 and P1 both communicated that they wanted to be in the classrooms more where they felt they could support their teachers. Both principals linked the inability to do this as much as they would like to their open door policy that also prevented them from being more visible throughout the day. P4 felt that she could be more supportive of her faculty if she had more time. Because of her open door policy, people, including parents, faculty, and staff, frequently visited in her office. While she encouraged and welcomed opportunities to meet with various stakeholders, she also realized that same open door policy often closed the door to being

available in teachers' classrooms to help when needed. She acknowledged that time-management was perhaps an area in which she needed to improve.

Sharing this view was P1 who also maintained an open door policy. He believed having such a policy was important to support educators. He wanted faculty members to know they could bring ideas or complaints to him and that he would be available to listen. Similar to P4, P1 recognized that supporting teachers by having an open door policy did prevent him from assisting his teachers in other ways such as participation in classroom activities.

P3 desired more time to support her teachers as well. She thought her school climate could be improved by providing:

teachers with more time to get what they need to get done. I just think that there is so much on teachers' plates right now and there is not enough time in their day to be a teacher. I think that there is continuous carryover of work at home, therefore, they are not allowed to be mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters, and aunts, and so, I think providing more time would help with climate.

P3 also believed she could support her teachers by advocating for an updated school for them. She felt strongly that her school's climate would most definitely improve if the building were updated. She believed that peoples' perceptions of cleanliness were related to a newer building. She noted that productivity levels tended to be higher in newer schools and that health concerns were also related to perceptions of the cleanliness of the building. Each school in the district was on a maintenance schedule determined by the administrators at the central offices. The district's school board developed an on-going capital improvement plan to address renovations and improvements necessary for existing schools. The third school was scheduled

for renovations in 2015 that will include windows, replacement floors, and lighting. This school was the only one in the study scheduled for major renovations in the near future.

In summary, support emerged as a theme that principals suggested was necessary to improve a school's climate. Much like when the participants defined the term *climate*, they knew what support meant, but defined it in a variety of ways. For two of the principals, supporting teachers meant that administrators should be in the classroom, not just to be visible, but also actually to help the teachers. Two principals indicated that support meant not assigning more responsibilities to teachers than was absolutely necessary. One of those principals desired to give teachers more time so they might be able to complete the mandatory tasks they had. Finally, one principal passionately felt renovating the school would significantly impact the climate of her school.

Relationship building and communication.

Building positive relationships and creating or maintaining open lines of communication were frequently mentioned by principals as methods necessary to improve the climate of a school. Communication, while not mentioned as a component of climate, emerged as a means of improving the climate of a school. P4, a self-proclaimed "people-person-relationship builder," indicated that she believed strong relationships already existed among and between faculty and staff members. She noted, "I have very low staff turnover and that is very helpful. So, we all have strong relationships to keep building on."

P1 and P3 communicated a similar belief regarding building relationships. For P1, getting to know his faculty and staff was part of his school climate improvement plan. He admitted that, "Trying to keep the machine well-oiled, I guess, is an on-going process. But, I think it is, for me, getting to know that machine even better..." P1 wanted to make grade level

or team changes, but felt as if he needed to know more about his faculty before making those changes, since he had only been at the school for three years. He was also a firm believer in building a sense of camaraderie and planned to try to strengthen those bonds through continued traditions such as the turkey hunt before Thanksgiving break and the “snackalty meetings” that permit socialization of faculty members prior to meetings.

P3 also wanted to promote more opportunities for faculty members to make connections. She professed a firm belief in not only getting to know her faculty and staff members, but also faculty and staff members getting to know each other and members of the community. She theorized that, “People want to know that they are important. When you call someone by their name, they respond with, ‘She knows me!’” She believed this held true for students and teachers. P3 believed that, to improve the climate in her school, more time to connect would be necessary. P3 stated:

I think that we would need to continuously make connections with people and if I could give teachers more time to make connections with the community and our parents and our business partners and extended community and take some more off their plates, that would help our climate.

Similar to P3, P2 leaned toward building relationships with community members. She believed having connections with business partners was important for the school’s climate. Business partners were members of the business community who were willing to form a relationship with the school community to enhance both the business and the school. Sometimes a business donated money to be used by the school to cover the cost of a field trip for students whose parents could not afford to pay. Business partners sometimes came to the school to teach lessons. For example, a banker might have taught classes on money management, or a martial

artist might have taught lessons on perseverance. For P2, who described herself as someone who was "...always open to ideas and suggestions...", the partnerships offered opportunities to help boost teacher morale and help teachers to build relationships during social events. P2 "worked out the relationship with the new owner (of a restaurant)...and they provided a certain amount of appetizers free." Teachers were invited to the restaurant, before official operating hours, so they could relax and socialize.

In summary, two of the four principals determined that a perfect school climate was unrealistic and unattainable. The other two principals thought that a perfect school climate was a lofty goal, but one that should not be dismissed. All of the principals had a vision of a school with a perfect climate and all of them had ideas of how to grow closer to that vision.

What Are the Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Specific Actions Adopted by the Principals to Create a Positive School Climate?

Principal Leadership Styles

All of the principals described their leadership style as shared or collaborative. Contrary to P1, P2, and P3, teachers from those schools presented differing views. Teachers in these schools perceived and suggested that while the principal might ask for teacher opinions and ideas, decisions were made solely by the principal with little regard for teacher input. T1B described the principal of the first school as persuasive in that he "presents options in such a way that one obviously sounds better than the rest." T1E agreed and added:

I feel like he wants to get teacher buy-in, but you do always get the sense like, you know, he is looking for something in particular...at some point you figure out, 'oh, that's what he wants,' and he is trying to get the buy-in from the teachers...He doesn't like confrontation or doesn't like upsetting things so he doesn't want to come right out and be

the person that says, 'We have to do it this way whether you like it or not.' (He doesn't want to be the) kind of person to put people off. So, I feel like he goes about it in the other way.

T1B concurred and said, "He makes decisions on his own but wants affirmation." The teachers agreed that while the principal was positive, he did not like confrontation, and that influenced his leadership style. Teachers of the first focus group shared that P1 knew the teachers' strengths, but avoided discussing or acknowledging their weaknesses. T1B stated, "He doesn't offer constructive criticism," and that he "never knows anything that I could improve on." T1C agreed saying, "He praises the good things but doesn't offer feedback about how to improve," which suggested that "he hasn't observed my teaching enough to even really know." The teachers of this focus group spoke longingly for constructive criticism, wanting to hear suggestions from their administrator on how they could become better teachers.

The second focus group presented a similar description of their principal's leadership style saying that while she allowed for and asked for teacher input regarding decision making, she made her own decisions, independent of any teacher input. They described P2 as direct and indicated that sometimes she would state, "This is what I would like."

The third focus group noted that P3 did not micromanage the teachers and according to T3B, she "leaves how you run your classroom up to you." They agreed with focus groups one and two in that she made decisions primarily on her own with no input from others. T3A stated, "It is my way management style."

Unlike the other three focus groups, the focus group from this school concurred with their principal. T4B indicated that P4 "presents the problem and asks for input." T4A agreed and said, "She is extremely open to our input." The teachers of this focus group shared a sense

of trust with their principal. T4A described her leadership style as “hands off; she trusts us to do our job.” T4C noted that P4 is “confident that the entire staff is here for kids.” P4 echoed this belief in her statement, “If it is research based and good for the kids, this staff is usually completely open.” T4A also noted that P4 was flexible and allowed teachers to attend to the needs of their own families without feeling guilty. T4D agreed that P4 “understands we have a life outside of school.”

As the discussions turned to teacher perceptions of how well principals knew their faculty members, focus groups one, two, and three agreed their principal shared strengths with them during evaluations, but most suggested the principals were not in the classrooms enough to know specifics. T3A supported this and said, “P3 doesn’t come in our rooms a lot outside of what is necessary.” P4 believed she knew her teachers quite well. This belief stemmed from an awareness that it was important to “play off strengths” but it was equally important for teachers to grow. She stated, “I think I know my teachers really well, what they’re good at, what they struggle with, and the type of student they serve best.” T4D supported this belief saying that P4 was “very aware of our strengths and weaknesses.” T4A indicated that her “open door policy helps her know our weaknesses. We can go to her for help.” The teachers of focus group four were in agreement that their input was important to and valued by their principal. They were comfortable in seeking her guidance and felt she knew her teachers well. They agreed with their principal’s description that she shared the leadership and maintained an open door policy.

To summarize, while all of the principals described their leadership styles as shared or collaborating, the perceptions of the teachers in the first, second, and third schools were different. These teachers perceived their principals as closer to an authoritarian style where the principal more or less made decisions with little or no input from the teachers. The teachers of

the fourth school perceived their principal as having a shared leadership style who frequently sought teacher input before making decisions.

Previous Principals' Actions

To determine whether interviewed principal mirrored or rejected the efforts of their previous administrators to create or maintain a positive school climate, the interviewed principals were asked to recall the efforts of the administrators they most admired. Since the interviewed principals perceived that their former principals were effective in creating a positive school climate, it stood to reason that the interviewed principals chose to mimic those actions.

The principal of the first school described the principal he most admired as someone who was fun, happy, approachable, and someone who liked to joke around with his faculty. Later in the interview, he described himself using many of the same adjectives. The teachers of this focus group affirmed their principal's description and perceived him to be someone how liked to have fun and joke with his faculty.

The principal of the second school recalled a former principal who promoted teamwork, allowed for school wide decision making, and acknowledged hard work with praise, special treats left in teachers' mailboxes, and school wide spirit days. She affirmed that she copied these actions and employed them in her current school. The teachers of this focus group acknowledged that the principal gave them special treats in their mailboxes, but disagreed with the comments regarding shared decision-making. They did not recognize that the principal praised their hard work or that she promoted teamwork.

In the third school, the principal described a former administrator she admired as one who trusted her to do her job and recognized and rewarded teachers for their accomplishments. She also discussed administrators who did not greet her which left her feeling as if she had

disappointed the administrator somehow. She believed this hurt the school's climate and decided to greet people by name at her school. The teachers of the third focus group did not recognize their principal as one who necessarily trusted the faculty or recognized or rewarded teachers for accomplishments. They did not recognize the principal's efforts to greet faculty, staff, and students by name.

In the fourth school, the principal described her favorite administrator as someone who was dedicated to forming strong relationships with his faculty and staff members and was determined to maintain an open door policy in an effort to promote a positive school climate. The principal perceived these actions as favorable and mirrored them as an administrator at her school. The teachers of this focus group acknowledged and appreciated their principal's efforts to build strong relationships and to maintain an open door policy.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Rewards.

Rewards or incentives emerged as a subtheme that principals used to create or maintain a positive school climate and were described as tangible tokens of appreciation principals gave to teachers usually to encourage participation in an event such as an after school or evening activity or to encourage teachers to donate to a school wide fundraising campaign. The rewards were typically in the form of Jeans Passes or Leave Early Passes, but could also include Spirit Days or special treats, such as candy, left in teachers' mailboxes. Teachers could redeem Jeans Passes for an opportunity to wear jeans to school on a day of their choice. Leave Early Passes were coupons teachers could redeem for the opportunity to leave school 25-30 minutes early. Spirit Days were rewards for a particular grade level or the entire school to dress wearing jeans and school spirit wear.

While most interviewed teachers were grateful for the Jeans Passes, Spirit Days, Leave Early Passes, and little treats placed in their mailboxes, several also acknowledged that those types of rewards were not motivating and did not help improve school climate. T2B claimed:

They are helpful, but it is like a mom and dad. You know, it is like when Mom and Dad are not there and they buy treasures for the kids. They don't need the treasures. They need their mom and dad. You know, a school needs their leader to be present.

The teachers of focus group four agreed and commented that while the Jeans Passes and Leave Early Passes were appreciated, and they were thankful to have them, they did not indicate the passes tremendously influenced the school's climate. The teachers in focus group three also concurred, saying that they were appreciative of all of the thoughtful gestures P3 did for them, especially the activities and special treats during Teacher Appreciation Week, but the teachers needed more than token rewards to boost the school's climate.

Although P1 did not include rewards such as Leave Early Passes or Jeans Passes in listing what he intentionally did to create or maintain a positive school, the teachers of the first focus group described and approved of the rewards. They enjoyed the passes for jeans and leaving early as well as the candy occasionally left in their mailboxes. In reference to candy in their mailboxes, T1E exclaimed, "It has been like a gift!" Concerning overall climate, T1A commented, "I think on a surface level, it's effective. It keeps me happy when I get a (30 minute) break or a Jeans Coupon, but when you look at the bigger picture of education, I feel a little disenfranchised..." T1B had a different opinion of the passes and remarked:

I don't like wearing jeans and I don't care for (30 minute) breaks because I don't use them, really, and I can never...I am not able to get them to cover my class when I would really need it so those don't mean anything to me.

Overall, most teachers enjoyed the various rewards and appreciated being able to dress casually or leave school early. Still, teachers did not perceive rewards as a principal action that created or maintained a positive school climate.

Recognition.

In the previous section, What Intentional Actions Do Elementary Principals Adopt to Promote a Positive School Climate for Their Teachers?, principals described various ways they tried to recognize teachers for a job well done or for exceeding expectations of a particular task. The interviewed teachers did not acknowledge recognition as an intended action adopted by principals to create or maintain a positive school climate.

Traditions.

Shared, repeated experiences or traditions was a theme that emerged during the principal interviews when participants were asked what the principal intentionally did to create or maintain a positive school climate. The teachers' descriptions follow.

In the first school, the teachers of the focus group mentioned that their principal had a tradition of playing his guitar at the beginning of the year faculty meeting. T1B acknowledged P1's guitar playing tradition and said:

One thing he does every year that I have been here, is the beginning of the year, he sings a song about coming back to school with his guitar. I think that brings a lot of teachers back to school somewhat positive because sometimes it is hard to come back from summer break, but he makes it just a little bit easier.

Other teachers of this focus group agreed that they enjoyed this tradition saying that it made the transition back to work easier.

Teachers of the second focus group did not acknowledge any of the traditions described by their principal as contributing to the positive climate of the school. Similarly, the teachers of the third focus group only noted that they enjoyed the special treats from their principal during Teacher Appreciation Week.

The fourth school had a rich tradition of socializing outside of the school after school hours. The principal arranged for these gatherings. The teachers in the focus group of the fourth school reminisced about social gatherings when a variety of people attended but indicated that more recently, fewer people came to the after school events. They enjoyed and appreciated the opportunities to socialize, but lamented the same people were frequently in attendance and would like if there were a way to encourage more faculty members. They later commented that they understood that people with growing families had other obligations and were perhaps not able to attend the socializing functions provided by their principal.

Improving the School Climate

As the interview moved into teachers rating their schools' climates, rating their principals' effectiveness, describing a perfect school climate, and making suggestions for improvement, teachers indicated a variety of responses. Since the participants were not 100% satisfied with the climate of his or her school and none considered his or her school's climate perfect, or their principal in terms of effectiveness, it stands to reason there was room for improvement in all of the schools.

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

Having teachers rate the climate of their schools and the effectiveness of their principals gave insight as to their perceptions of those categories. Ratings also gave a perspective of how far the climate of their schools was from a perfect climate and how far their principal was from

attaining 100% effectiveness based on the perceptions of the teachers. Teachers' responses were varied regarding how they rated their principals' effectiveness and the schools' climate, but more explanation was given during the interview process that helped to clarify how they really felt and perceived.

Teachers gave their schools a range of scores from two to four and one-half when asked how close their schools were to having a perfect climate on a scale of one to five with five being perfect. The teachers' responses were varied with 6% who rated their schools at four and one-half, 53% who rated the climate at four, 7% who gave their schools' climate a rating of three and one-half, 27% who rated the climate at three, and the remaining 7% rating the school's climate as two and one-half. Figure 11 illustrates the ratings by teachers of the schools' climate.

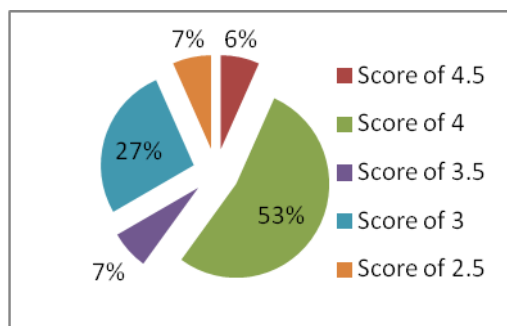


Figure 11. Results of teachers' perfect climate scaled question

For the teachers of the first school, they rated their school climate as four with the exception of T1E who said, "And I would say 4.5 to be different." Even though the teachers rated the school's climate as high, they did not sincerely believe that the positive climate was a result of the principal's efforts. When asked to rate the principal's effectiveness of maintaining a positive climate, the results were lower than the overall ratings for the climate. They agreed they enjoyed working at the school and believed the overall climate to be positive, but had determined it was not necessarily because of the principal. They ranked his effectiveness as three on a five-

point scale. T1B considered the teachers at the school when ranking the principal's effectiveness. She explained:

I feel like the teachers, in general, are happy. So, his effectiveness must be good, but then, you know, I feel like there is a different caliber of teachers at this school, too. I feel like no matter what principal we have, we're all going to be working to do our best and improving. I feel like this general group of teachers is just a positive group of people. So, I don't think the administration necessarily matter much.

Although P1 allowed certain traditions, rewards, and recognitions to take place, T1A did not offer credit to him and said, "But those things like the breaks, the Jeans Coupons, the turkey hunt, the egg hunt, those are (our school's) traditions...but it's not like they came from him."

The teachers of the second school gave similar responses to the teachers of the first school in that they believed the teachers were the reason for the positive climate rather than the efforts of the principal. As T2A explained, "We run ourselves well." T2B agreed and confided, "We do not have a poor climate, but I just can't say that it comes from the leadership. It comes from within." T2A continued, "I think that it comes from within. Our teachers are very strong; their teams are very strong; and the teams are strong with other teams. We do a good job of getting things done that need to be done." Overall, the teachers of the second school agreed that their school's climate was positive even though they rated it as two and one-half or three on a five-point scale. They believed the positive climate came from the strong relationships teachers had with each other and from the positive work ethic demonstrated by the different teams. When asked about the effectiveness of their principal in maintaining a positive school climate, T2A and T2B agreed it would be three. Although on a scale of one to five, three was average, the teachers' statements illustrated a different story. They described an uncommon faculty that was

able to function well without a great deal of influence or interaction from the principal. T2B explained, "...I just don't know if with a different faculty that you would get the same outcome."

The teachers of the third school echoed their principal as T3A spoke for the group, "Perfect just isn't reality." They rated the overall climate of the school as average but clarified their score by adding that they did not feel valued and that their opinions were not appreciated or heard. The teachers of this focus group also agreed that the lack of consistency brought the score down. T3A explained, "I think that we are not so far from the mark that we can't get to a much more elevated climate but things continue to happen which is out of her control..." T3B concurred, "I think, you know, staff, especially those people on the same team work well together, they like each other, they enjoy coming to work and being with each other. I think that definitely helps. T3C agreed and added, "I think that we could be higher (the climate rating) if we had the consistency." This focus group rated their principal's effectiveness as average on a scale of one to five. T3A and T3B agreed that the traditions, rewards, and recognitions were appreciated, but felt there was more to promoting a school climate. T3A suggested, "I think people really have a hard time not having any kind of input at all and feeling like their opinion doesn't count."

The teachers of the fourth school rated their principal's effectiveness as between four and five. T4E rated her effectiveness as four and one-half "because it is hard with this job. Things do become stale and it is just hard to just always implement everything that you want to do. So, I don't think she's perfect." T4C, who ranked P4's effectiveness as a four, added, "She does the best she can. We know that. She never wants to make more work. She always stresses that." The teachers of this focus group rated their school's climate as between three and one-half and four on a scale of one to five on a perfect climate continuum. They stressed that in a perfect

school there would be more student discipline, more teacher participation in social activities, and more interaction with the community. T4B defended the school's climate and said:

I am planted here. I like the climate here; I like the kids; I like the principal; and I like the people I work with. I mean, I am sure there are things that could be better. Maybe a little more discipline on the kids' part, but like I said, having been in four other different climates, it hasn't been any better than this.

In summary, the teachers of the focus groups reported a wide range of scores when asked about the climate of their schools. They rated the schools anywhere from two and one-half to four and one-half on a five-point scale. The teachers of schools one, two, and three rated their principals' effectiveness in creating or maintaining a positive school climate for teachers as average. The teachers of the fourth school rated their principal's effectiveness as a four or four and one-half.

Principal visibility.

Visibility of the principals emerged as one way to promote a positive school climate. Teachers, overall, wanted to see their administrators in the halls, cafeteria, and classrooms during the school day. Teachers were not looking for hands-on help from the administrators, but rather their presence and availability throughout the school during the day and at activities throughout the school year. According to the interviewed teachers, increased visibility of the principal would make a positive difference in the schools' climate.

Teacher focus groups of schools one and three shared their concerns of the lack of the principals' visibility. The teachers of the first focus group offered contradictory views of the principal's visibility. T1D conveyed that, "He comes around too frequently, just to stop by and say, 'Hello,' and if you ask him to come and read stories, he is often available..." Yet T1B

shared, "...I don't see him down here very often...I wish that he would be in the classroom more. I think I have seen him maybe four times this year in my classroom." T1A agreed that more time in the classroom would be beneficial, but indicated, "I always get the sense that he would like to be in the classrooms more, but I think, honestly, I think there might be a prioritizing problem." T1A went on to explain:

You know that sometimes the immediate thing is taking place of the important. I think he feels like he wants to be in the classroom. I get that sense from him, but he lets other things in the way rather than being there.

Although P3 maintained that she was "one of those people in the trenches," T3C and T3A had a different perception and said that they would like to see their principal more frequently. T3A added that more involvement with the students would help improve the climate. She indicated that the principal had a tendency to spend more time with students who were burdened with unfortunate situations such as a deceased family member, a family member who was abusing drugs or alcohol, or an abusive parent. T3A appreciated the principal's reasoning for the extra attention, but wanted her administrator to understand that the students who do not live under such tragic conditions were also in need of her attention. T3A suggested:

You know it is the one (student) that has the tragedy and the one that has the bad home life and you know, some have special circumstances, in my mind, seem to get more attention than the one that just comes and doesn't get noticed really because they are quiet...I think that they need (attention) just as much...

While the principal of the second school did not remark about visibility, T2A and T2B perceived the principal's lack of visibility as an area that needed considerable attention. Both

T2A and T2B expressed concern about the excessive noise level and behavior of students in the cafeteria. Said T2A:

...every parent that I have talked to about the cafeteria says it's out of control. That is one of those places that we need their presence. Teachers go in there, monitors are in there, but it doesn't do any good. They need administrators to be seen.

T2B agreed saying, "We should have an administrator in there every day..." Additionally, T2A stated that the climate of the school would benefit from "more (of the principal's) presence in the classroom." She added, "Being seen in the classroom, the cafeteria, being a part of what is going on in the classroom." Both teachers acknowledged that the principal was absent from school because of meetings she was required to attend, but repeated that the visibility is a "big issue."

T2A and T2B clarified their statements saying that they enjoyed not having "somebody hovering over you and looking in your plan book, making sure you have all your stuff done on time and checking behind you." Still, T2B concluded that when the principal was at school, she remained in her office. The administrators need to be "out and about in the school, seeing what is going on around them." There were students at the end of the year, according to T2A, who could not even identify the school's principal.

Missing from the conversation about principal visibility was the teacher focus group of the fourth school. Although the principal perceived that she needed to be in the classrooms more, she maintained that her open door policy made it difficult to find time during the day to get out of her office as much as she would like. The teachers enjoyed the open door policy and did not indicate that their school climate would improve with more principal visibility.

In summary, teachers in three of the focus groups perceived that a more visible principal would promote a positive school climate, yet they recognized that the principals were burdened

with numerous tasks that made it difficult for the administrators to find time to be in the classrooms on a daily basis. Still, the teachers felt visibility should be regarded by the principals as a priority in their schedule. Only the teachers of the fourth focus group did not indicate a need for more principal visibility.

Principal support.

Support from the principal emerged as a significant recommendation for improving the climate of the school. Principals and teachers perceived that more support was necessary, but there was little agreement regarding the type of support that was most beneficial. Support had different meanings for each individual and ranged from being heard, to discussing the curriculum, to consistency in managing the school.

Teachers of the first school were the only teachers to identify the school's physical space as a component of school climate. They did not indicate, however, a need to improve their building in order to cultivate a more positive climate. The principal of the third school did perceive that renovations to the school would most definitely improve the climate of the school, but the teachers of this focus group did not share the perception.

The second focus group of teachers perceived that support was lacking from their principal. They felt their opinions were not heard or appreciated in that the principal tended to make decisions on her own with little regard for teachers' ideas. Further, they indicated that the principal was frequently out of the building and therefore unavailable and unable to offer any support. When the principal was at the school, this focus group indicated that she was not seen throughout the school. The teachers perceived the principal as unsupportive because she was unavailable whether or not she was in the building.

Although the principal of the third school perceived teachers needed more time to get their work done in order to feel supported, the teachers of the third school did not crave more time as suggested by their principal, but rather, consistency was one of their most sought after types of support to improve school climate. Various reasons were given and teachers acknowledged that, for the most part, the lack of consistency was no one's fault, but more a case of unfortunate circumstances that prevented their principal from being at school. Additionally, there was a lack of consistency in the assistant principal when she left for several weeks of maternity leave. The teachers had several substitute administrators for extended periods of time who had varying levels of expectations for the teachers. This lack of consistency contributed to the teachers' feelings of not being supported.

When considering what support meant to them, the teachers of the third focus group also included more teamwork. T3B explained, "...everyone cooperating and working together instead of this team working by themselves and this team working by themselves and administration by themselves. Kind of everyone together, sharing ideas and...those ideas being valued." That statement led to a discussion of teachers feeling that their ideas were not valued. T3A's perception was, "I think people really have a hard time not having any kind of input at all and feeling like their opinion doesn't count." She later added, "So it is, you know, because the idea is being squished before it is ever looked at."

The teachers of the fourth focus group seemed to appreciate the open door support offered by their principal and to understand that the principal could not be in two places at one time, referring to being visible during the school day. Teachers of the fourth focus group praised their principal for her availability and her willingness to listen. T4B explained, "I feel like she has an open door policy. Like, if I need something, I can go in there and talk to her honestly.

I'm not afraid to say, 'Hey, I need this.'" Teachers of the fourth school expressed a high comfort level in being able to approach their principal with concerns. They appreciated not only her open door policy, but also her open-mindedness. The teachers of this focus group gave the impression that they trusted P4 and sincerely believed she was available to help them through any problems they might have had whether those concerns were personal or professional in nature. They compared their school community to that of a family. They felt supported by their principal.

To summarize, teachers of one focus group mentioned physical space of the school as it related to climate, but they were from a different school than the principal who wanted renovations. For the most part, teachers felt supported when they believed their principal listened to and valued them. Teachers also felt supported when they worked together with their colleagues. The teachers who perceived their principals employed an open-door policy appreciated that support.

Relationship building and communication.

Building positive relationships and creating or maintaining open lines of communication were frequently mentioned by teachers as methods necessary to improve the climate of a school. Establishing and maintaining relationships between principal and teachers was important, but teachers also thought relationships among teachers on their own grade level and between grade levels were equally as important for a positive school climate. Communication, while not mentioned as a component of climate, emerged as a means of improving the climate of a school.

The teachers of the fourth school concurred with their principal in that they already have strong relationships in place. T4A summarized by saying:

I feel like she makes us feel like a family within the teacher world, which is sometimes great and sometimes it is really rough too, because you're pretty honest with your family

sometimes and get on each other's nerves, but she makes us feel comfortable with treating each other that way and having that closeness. That helps us get the job done.

While teachers of focus group four agreed that they enjoyed the family-like bond that they have, several suggested that to make their school's climate even better, more opportunities to socialize and strengthen those bonds would be necessary. T4E commented that although he knew some colleagues who taught on different grade levels, "...it would be nice to have some events where we cross mingle and get together and let loose a little bit." The focus group agreed that more socializing outside of school was a good idea. One teacher, T4A, remembered:

I know that when I first started working here, we had, like, our winter party, the end of the year party together, which was a whole lot of fun. But, over the years, you have seen where it is the same group of people who come to it and it doesn't really...so it is hard...

T4D reminisced about team building activities:

When I was at a previous school, we used to have retreats and where we would meet toward the end of August before school started. We would actually get hotel rooms and stay over somewhere...we would do some professional development and team building activities, but then there was also fun built in. Like, we took a trolley tour of (the city) and stuff like that. So, more team building.

After more discussion, they concluded that, although team-building activities were a good idea, once teachers began to have families of their own, other obligations prevented them from attending work-related social events.

The teachers of the first school appreciated the traditions that their principal continued.

T1E conveyed:

I think we have started having faculty meetings where we have time to gather and talk and eat beforehand. So I feel like that builds a good climate. (It gives) teachers time to talk and see one another and catch up whether it is school related or not. It is helpful.

Contrary to this, T1A wanted more discussion about instruction saying, “I don’t care for meetings where we just get lists of things. You could send me an email...” This led to a discussion in this focus group regarding not just relationship building, but also collaboration.

T1E suggested:

I feel like if (our) principal could encourage more collaboration in, like, us getting into each other’s rooms and observing each other and us having time to really dig into student work and look at where they are coming from, where they are going, or even know where they are. I feel like sometimes, we don’t have time to do the most important things that we need to do. So, I feel like that would be helpful.

The principals of the second and third schools felt strongly that building relationships with community business partners was important to the climate of the school. The teachers who participated in the focus groups of these two schools did not recognize the principals’ efforts to build strong relationships through the contacts made with the community business partners as means of improving the climate of the school.

In summary, building strong relationships and maintaining open lines of communication were ways teachers perceived principals might promote a more positive school climate. Building relationships with other teachers both on the same grade level and on other grade levels was important to some of the teachers. Maintaining an open door policy and creating a sense of family was perceived by one focus group as crucial to the climate of their school.

To What Extent Are the Perceptions Aligned?

Defining Climate

The term *climate* has been investigated by many researchers who have yet to agree on a common definition for the word or agree on common components that should be considered when researching the climate of a school. Many concede that it is a vague concept and difficult to define (Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Dixon, Johnson, & Toman, 1991; Johnson, Dixon, & Edens, 1992; Hoy, 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Marshall, 2004; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Syvertsen, Flanagen, & Stout, 2009; Zullig et al., 2010). Researchers who have spanned decades and contributed to defining *climate* and/or adding to the components that should be included in the definition include Halpin and Croft (1963), Hoy et al. (2002), Brookover et al. (1978), Gunbayi (2007), Gottfredson et al. (2005), Kelley et al. (2005) Menon and Christou (2002), Arlestig (2007), Hoy (1990), Uline et al. (2009), Fisher et al. (1986), Lubinski et al. (2008), Barke et al. (2006), and Bradshaw et al. (2008). Still, with all of the definitions and components put together by these researchers, the principals and teachers of the current study had ideas of their own.

Some of the definitions and components matched the researchers' ideas, but many did not. Table 12 in the next chapter demonstrates the comparison of researchers' and the current study's participants' views of defining climate. Of the 43 various categories that are included in either the researchers' or the participants' definitions of climate, there are seven occasions when the principals and teachers' views are aligned with each other. Teachers and principals agreed that relationships between and among teachers, administrators, and students was a factor to consider in defining climate. They also agreed that support, recognition, the physical building, the overall mood of the school, teachers feeling valued or appreciated, and attitudes of the

teachers and administrators were important concepts that should be included in defining the climate of the school. It should be noted that recorded on Table 12 was any time a teacher or principal mentioned a component. For example, two teachers and one principal from two different schools thought that the physical building should be considered when defining the climate of the school. They were the only participants to acknowledge this.

Overall, in defining climate, teachers and principals' perceptions aligned approximately 16% of the time with all of the various categories that principals, teachers, and previous researchers included in the definition or the components of *climate*. Compared to each other's comments, the teachers and principals' views were aligned 37% of the time.

Principal Leadership Styles

Researchers (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, Lee, 1982; Barth, 1986; Pallas, 1988; Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1995; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, Dipaola, 2006; Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Williams, Persaud, & Turner, 2008; Cohen, McNabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010; Smith & Maika, 2008) noted that the principal's role in creating or maintaining the climate of the school is important. The principal is in a unique position to determine the climate of the school (Barth, 1986; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al. 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Krakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Cohen et al., 2009). Lontos (1992) determined that the transformational leader makes a point of visiting classrooms daily, involves the entire staff in developing vision statements, goals, and beliefs, and shares decisions with teachers. Gallmeier (1992) did not find one leadership style more effective than another, but did determine that the principal was key in creating an effective school. Kelley et al. (2005) indicated that the

principals should be able to accurately determine his or her leadership style and understand the impact it has on the staff.

In the current study, principals and teachers were asked to describe the principal's leadership style. The principals all confidently stated they maintained a shared or collaborative leadership style, which is consistent with the transformational leader described by Lontos (1992). All of the principals stated that, aside from safety and budget decisions, they shared the decision making process with their teachers. The principals gave specific examples to support their declarations. They cited surveys, small group discussions, round table discussions, and open-door policies that invited teachers to contribute to the decision-making process.

The teachers of the first, second, and third focus groups perceived their administrators' leadership styles differently. They felt their principals were closer to a top-down management style rather than a collaborative one. These focus groups indicated that while their principals asked for input, the perception was that the teachers' input was inconsequential because the principal had already made a decision. In this case, the perceptions of the principals and teachers of the first, second, and third schools were not aligned.

The teachers of the focus group of the fourth school were the only ones who agreed with their principal in that not only did the principal seek input from teachers, but also she truly considered the input when making decisions. The principal of this school estimated that 95% of the decisions were put before the faculty that then comes to consensus before a final decision was made. The description the fourth focus group gave of their principal was much closer to the transformational type leader described by Lontos (1992) than the descriptions given by any other focus group. Additionally, this focus group supported the research of Pepper and Thomas

(2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) in that building a sense of trust and having a good rapport between the administration and the teachers was important to a positive school climate.

To summarize, the principals all perceived themselves as having a shared or collaborative leadership style. The teachers in the focus groups in schools one, two, and three did not share their principals' perceptions and described principals whose leadership styles were closer to a top-down type of management. The perceptions of the teachers and principal in the fourth school were aligned in that they all believed the principal had a shared leadership style.

Previous Principals' Actions

Since much research supported the notion that principals play a key role in determining the climate of the school (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, Lee, 1982; Barth, 1986; Pallas, 1988; Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1995; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, Dipaola, 2006; Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Williams, Persaud, & Turner, 2008; Cohen, McNabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010; Smith & Maika, 2008), the current study explored whether administrators copied or rejected the perceived actions of their former principals. All four of the interviewed principals had taught prior to becoming administrators. They were asked to recall a favorite administrator they had while in the classroom. The interviewed principals described former administrators who valued teachers' opinions, trusted teachers, and empowered them by allowing them to be part of the decision-making process. Teamwork and support were also characteristics these principals recalled of their favorite administrators. The interviewed principal of the fourth school also commented that the principal she most admired maintained an open-door policy, promoted a positive relationship with teachers who in turn, felt at ease asking for help when needed.

The first interviewed principal described his favorite administrator as fun, happy, approachable, and someone who liked to joke around with his faculty. Later in the interview, he used many of these same traits to describe himself. He enjoyed laughing, having fun, and joking with his faculty and staff. The teachers of this focus group affirmed his description. While they did not describe him as authoritarian or dictator-like, they also did not view him as collaborative to the extent that he described himself. They acknowledged that he asked for teacher input but perceived he had already made a decision thus making their input invalid. They believed he did not like confrontation and therefore did not want to be seen as one who made unpopular decisions. Except for the non-confrontational descriptor, the focus group described the principal most admired by his or her own principal. It is fair to conclude that, in this case, the principal mirrored what he perceived to be characteristics of a good administrator.

The second principal recalled a former principal who promoted teamwork, allowed for school wide decision making, and acknowledged hard work with praise, special treats left in teachers' mailboxes, or school wide spirit days. These were activities that she employed as well to help build a positive school climate. The teachers of this focus group acknowledged that they enjoyed and appreciated the efforts of the principal, but that they would prefer she be more present in their classrooms and throughout the school during the day. The teachers did not acknowledge teamwork efforts of the principal and disagreed that she allowed for school wide decision making. It is reasonable to conclude that when the principal was a teacher, she enjoyed the treats and notes that her administrator left in teachers' mailboxes and therefore decided to imitate those actions with the idea that her teachers would enjoy them too. The focus group agreed to some extent with their principal in that they enjoyed the treats, but not as much as the principal perceived.

The principal of the third school recalled a favorite former administrator who trusted the faculty members to teach and manage their classrooms without being micromanaged by the administrator. She also described a principal who supported teachers. P3 was the only principal to recall that some administrators she had as a classroom teacher did not recognize or greet faculty members by name. This left her with feelings of doubt about herself. She learned from this experience the importance of greeting teachers by name and extended the gesture to include learning the names of the students in her school. The perceptions of the third school's focus group did not match with their principal's perceptions. They perceived her, not as trustworthy and supportive, but as inconsistent and insensitive to their ideas. They did not acknowledge that the principal made an effort to call everyone by name.

The fourth principal described the administrator she most admired as one who maintained an open-door policy and tried to create positive relationships with his faculty so they would trust him and feel comfortable going to him for help when needed. The principal of the fourth school emulated those qualities, which was recognized and acknowledged by her teachers in their description of her.

In summary, the perceptions of the interviewed principals and those of the participating teachers were mixed. While the interviewed principals emulated the traits or actions of previous principals they admired, teachers of the participating focus groups did not acknowledge the traits or actions as having an influence on the climate of the school. The exception to this was in school four where the perceptions of the principal and members of the focus group were aligned in that teachers agreed with their principal that she tried to establish strong relationships and teachers felt comfortable asking for her help with professional and personal issues.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Rewards.

Rewards or incentives emerged in this study as a subtheme that principals used to promote a positive school climate. Tangible tokens of appreciation, the rewards were usually given by principals to teachers to encourage participation in an event such as an after school or evening activity. Rewards or incentives were also used to encourage participation in a school wide or district wide fundraising campaign. The rewards were typically a pass that allowed teachers to wear jeans on a day of their choice or a pass that allowed teachers to leave school 25-30 minutes early. Rewards also included Spirit Days or special treats such as candy left in teachers' mailboxes. Spirit Days were rewards that allowed a particular grade level, group, or the entire school to dress in jeans and school spirit wear.

While the principals used the rewards, believing they promoted a positive school climate, teachers' perceptions did not match. Teachers agreed that they enjoyed the various rewards, but were not convinced they contributed to a positive school climate. In fact, for teachers who did not prefer to wear jeans or who were unable to leave school early because of school-related obligations, the Jeans and Leave Early Passes offered no motivation. The majority of the teachers agreed that they appreciated the passes, but that the passes, Spirit Days, and candy were not related to the school's overall climate.

Recognition.

Recognition emerged in this study as praise given to a teacher or group of teachers for completing a task in a way that exceeded the principal's expectations. Recognition was given either publicly or privately and was given from principal to teacher or from one teacher to another. All of the principals indicated they recognized teachers in several ways. They cited examples such as written notes, a Coke and a Compliment, The Golden Apple Award, shout-

outs, and Teacher of the Year. Principals explained that while notes were private recognition of teachers' efforts, other strategies, such as the Golden Apple Award, were public recognition. The Golden Apple Award was encouraged by the principal but was actually given from one teacher to another publicly at a faculty meeting. Similarly, a Coke and a Compliment was a strategy encouraged by the principal but given publicly at faculty meeting from one teacher to another. The Teacher of the Year Award was a public recognition of one superior teacher each year. Shout-outs were only employed by one principal, P3, and were a method of recognizing a teacher or group of teachers through an in-house weekly newsletter.

While the principals tried to recognize teachers for exemplary task completion, the interviewed teachers of the focus groups did not put as much emphasis on these efforts in terms of creating or maintaining a positive school climate. The Gold Apple Award mentioned by P3 and P4 was not acknowledged by teachers in focus groups of schools three or four. P3 and P4 also employed the Coke and a Compliment opportunity, but teachers of focus groups three and four did not recognize this either. P3 included the Teacher of the Year Award as an effort to recognize well-deserving teachers to promote a positive school climate. Teachers of the third focus group did not acknowledge this effort. P3 described the shout-outs in the in-house weekly newsletter, but the teachers of the third focus group did not acknowledge this effort as creating or maintaining a positive school climate. Finally, P2 preferred private notes or emails sent to teachers to validate their efforts. Teachers of the second focus group did not acknowledge the principal's notes as a means of promoting a positive school climate. P1 recognized verbally and celebrated publicly at faculty meetings the positive accomplishments of teachers. The teachers of the first focus group did not acknowledge the principal's efforts as promoting a positive school climate.

To summarize briefly, all four of the participating principals employed recognition of teacher accomplishments as one way to create or maintain a positive school climate. The teachers of the four focus groups did not perceive those efforts as promoting a positive school climate, although some teachers did appreciate the special treats placed in their mailboxes as recognition of a job well done.

Traditions.

Shared, repeated experiences or traditions emerged in this study as another strategy principals adopted to create or maintain a positive school climate for their teachers. Several traditions were described by the interviewed principals. P1 and P3 both employed hand shaking as a way to promote a positive school climate, but the teachers of focus groups one and three did not share their perceptions. The teachers of those focus groups did not acknowledge hand shaking as a means of promoting a positive school climate.

P1 and P3 described their efforts to prepare meals for their teachers in an attempt to promote a positive school climate. P1 maintained a tradition of cooking breakfast omelets for his teachers while P3 enjoyed hosting a cookout for her teachers for lunch. The teachers of focus groups one and three did not perceive the principals' efforts as contributing to the climate of the schools.

P1 encouraged faculty members to bring snacks to faculty meetings and to socialize with one another before the business portion of the meetings began. The focus group of this school perceived the principal's efforts as contributing to the climate of the school. Thus, in this instance, the perceptions were aligned.

Traditions carried out by the second interviewed principal included a vast array of special spirit days such as Pink Day, Mix-Matched Socks Day, Twin Day, Crazy Hair Day, and Pajama

Day. She also provided traditions such as an Easter egg hunt for her teachers. More academically oriented traditions included Science Night and Health and Fitness Night. The teachers of this focus group did not acknowledge these traditions as contributing to the climate of the school and therefore, perceptions were not aligned.

The principal of the fourth school explained that she tried to organize events after school and away from school where teachers had the opportunity to socialize and build relationships in a relaxing environment. The teachers of this focus group reminisced about social gatherings when a variety of people attended but indicated that more recently, fewer people actually attended the events. They appreciated the effort, but lamented the same people were frequently in attendance and would have preferred if more faculty members attended. They did not perceive this tradition as currently contributing to the positive school climate at their school. The perceptions in this case were not aligned.

Improving the School Climate

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

When asked to rate their schools' climate on a scale of one to five, with five being the perfect school climate, the interviewed principals rated their schools' climate as between three and four. The overall feeling of the principal interviews was one of confidence that their school climate was positive. They indicated that while perfection was not possible, their climate was in a good position. Some believed that even though they did not consider perfection as attainable, it was a goal toward which they could strive. Others believed perfection was not possible and, therefore, not worth considering as a realistic goal for school climate.

Teacher ratings of the schools' climate ranged from two to four and one-half, depending on the school. Teachers of three of the four focus groups described a positive climate where

teachers have positive attitudes and work well together thus contributing to the reason the climate was positive. They asserted that the principal's efforts were not responsible for the climate being as positive as it was. The teachers determined that it was the teachers who maintained the school's positive climate, sometimes in spite of the administration. The teachers believed that a different faculty might not be as positive as the current faculty, therefore creating a less than desirable climate. This finding is contrary to much of the literature (Kelley et al., 2005; Thomas, 1997; Anderman et al., 1991; Gallmeier, 1992) that pointed to the principal as the key to the school's climate. Interviewed teachers suggested that the positive school climate was a result of the teachers with positive attitudes who worked well together and who have formed strong bonds with each other. Three of the four schools' focus groups believed their faculty was unique in that the faculty was so strong and so positive.

Specifically, the interviewed principal of the first school rated his school's climate as three on the five-point scale. He believed the staff worked well together, but admitted there were some factors that were out of his control such as transfers, deaths, and conflicts among staff members. The participating teachers of the first school rated the school's climate as a four, but claimed that the teachers were more responsible for the positive school climate than the principal was. The teachers in this focus group rated their principal's effectiveness as a three of five and believed that he was not responsible for the climate of the school citing that many of the actions were in place before he arrived as an administrator. As close as the principal and teachers' ratings were in terms of the school's climate, the overall comments did not align.

The participating principal of the second school felt confident that her school's climate was good and rated it as four out of five indicating that a perfect school climate was not possible and that her school's climate was good, but that there would always be room for improvement.

The teachers in the focus group of the second school indicated a lower rating for the school's climate than the principal did. They rated the climate as a three out of five and shared perceptions with the first school in that the teachers were more responsible for the school's positive school climate than was the principal. When asked about the effectiveness of the principal, the focus group agreed a rating of three out of five was accurate. In this case, the perceptions of the school's climate from the principal and teachers' point of view did not align.

In the third school, the interviewed principal believed a perfect school climate was not attainable, but thought her school's climate was good and rated it four out of five. She believed the low teacher turnover rate indicated teachers were happy. The participating teachers of the third focus group agreed that perfection was not reality, but rated the overall climate of the school as three. Even though this points to an average climate, the teachers clarified and added that they did not feel valued and did not feel that their opinions were appreciated nor heard. They rated their principal's effectiveness as three also. Overall, the perceptions of the participating principal and teachers of the third school did not align.

The principal of the fourth school also pointed to her low staff turnover rate as an indicator of a positive school climate. She rated her school's climate, which she thought was positive, as three and one-half on a five-point scale. The participating teachers of the fourth focus group collectively rated their school's climate as between three and one-half and four on a scale of one to five on a perfect climate continuum. They rated their principal's effectiveness as between four and four and one-half. They praised her efforts and knew that it was difficult for their principal to implement all of the activities she desired in order to further improve the school's climate. Overall, the perceptions did not match in terms of the rating of the climate, but the comments of the participants were closely aligned.

Principal visibility.

Principal visibility emerged as one way to promote a positive school climate. Overall, teachers wanted to see their administrators throughout the school during the school day. Interviewed principals in the first and fourth schools perceived that being visible would increase their school's positive climate. They both claimed an open-door policy that prevented them from visiting classrooms, the cafeteria, and hallways as much as they would like. The open door policy was a vital part of building relationships with all stakeholders, but that same policy closed the door to visiting throughout the school because of time constraints.

The teachers of these focus groups acknowledged the open door policy and understood that it would take time away from the principals being able to visit throughout the school, but they thought visibility should become a priority for the principals.

The second principal did not mention visibility as a means of promoting a positive school climate, but her teachers thought it was extremely important. The teachers of this focus group indicated there were students who were not able to identify the school's principals at the end of the year. These teachers pointed to the fact that the principal was not only not visible throughout the school, but that she was invisible and that created a negative impact on the school's climate. In this case, the perceptions were not aligned.

The third participating principal recognized visibility as a factor necessary to a positive school climate and thought she was visible. She saw herself as one who worked with the teachers and participated in activities alongside of them. The teachers of this focus group had a different perception. They indicated they would like to see their principal more frequently and that more interactions with more students would be helpful in promoting a positive school climate.

In summary, perceptions were mixed in terms of their alignment. Three of the four principals acknowledged the necessity for visibility and realized that being in the halls, cafeterias, and in the classrooms would be beneficial to the climate of the school. One of those three felt she was already visible, but teachers of this focus group disagreed. The other two of the three understood more visibility would be helpful, but felt their open door policy prevented them from leaving their offices. The teachers of those schools echoed the need and recognized that the principals were burdened with numerous tasks that made it difficult for the administrators to find time to be visible on a daily basis. Finally, one principal did not mention visibility as a source of promoting a positive school climate, but the teachers of that focus group craved visibility from their principal.

Principal support.

Principal support for classroom teachers emerged as a recommendation for improving school climate. Although principals and teachers agreed that more support was necessary, they did not agree on the type of support that was most beneficial. The interviewed principals of schools one and four both commented that they felt they could better support their teachers if they were in the classrooms helping more. Both principals indicated that their inability to be in the classrooms as much as they wanted was directly linked to the open door policy they employed. The interviewed teachers of both of these schools appreciated the open door policy and the opportunity it gave them to speak with their principal when necessary. In this case, perceptions were aligned in that an open door policy helped teachers to feel supported.

In the second participating school, the principal did not name specific elements of support. This is reflected in Table 5 where P2 has no specific areas of support marked. Interestingly, the teachers of the second focus group indicated they would feel more supported if

their principal were available to them during the school day. They also desired to be heard. In this case, the perceptions of teachers and the principal were not aligned.

In the third school, the interviewed principal felt she could be more supportive of her teachers if she could provide them with more time and fewer responsibilities. She also felt strongly that she supported her teachers already by advocating for an updated building for them. The teachers' perceptions of support did not center on a clean or renovated building or even more time and fewer responsibilities. The teachers' perceptions of support from their principal included consistency in their administration, the opportunity for more teamwork, a sense of feeling valued by the principal, the principal being willing to listen to their ideas, and having the principal available to them. In this case, the principal and teachers' perceptions were not aligned regarding support.

In the fourth participating school, the principal indicated she supported the teachers by maintaining an open door policy that enabled her to build strong relationships with her teachers. She contended that she would like to offer more support to teachers if she had more time and could help them in their classrooms and be more visible throughout the school during the day. The teachers of this focus group felt supported by their principal because of her open door policy. They felt as if they could talk to her regarding professional and personal issues and that she would listen and offer advice. The perceptions in this case were partially aligned in that both teachers and the principal acknowledged the principal's open door policy as a means of support.

Table 5 illustrates the summary of the alignment of the perceptions of the teachers and principals participating in this study. Of particular interest, P2 did not contribute specific areas of support, thus no criteria are marked.

Table 5

Alignment of Principal and Teacher Perceptions of Support

| Support | P1 | T1 | P2 | T2 | P3 | T3 | P4 | T4 |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| The principal in the classrooms more | X | | | | | | X | |
| More time for self to be able to support teachers in various ways | | | | | | | X | |
| Principal visibility and/or availability | X | | | X | | X | X | |
| Consistency of administration | | | | | | X | | |
| Provide teachers with more time | | | | | X | | | |
| Opportunity for more teamwork | | | | | | X | | |
| Feeling heard by administration | | | | | | X | | |
| Feeling valued by administration | | | | X | | X | | |
| Renovated building or advocating for renovating building | | X | | | X | | | |
| Principal to maintain open door policy | X | X | | | | | X | X |

The open door policy is a means of support already implemented by P1 and P4. P3 was already implementing support through advocating for her teachers to have a renovated building. The remaining listed items in Table 5 are those either the principals wanted to implement or teachers wanted to have principals include in ways to support. As noted in Table 5, perception alignment was shared only by P1, T1, P4, and T4 in the category of “principal to maintain an open door policy.” Perceptions of support were not aligned in the remaining cases.

Relationship building and communication.

Building positive relationships and creating or maintaining open lines of communication emerged as methods necessary to improve the climate of a school. The principal of the first

school indicated that getting to know his faculty better was part of his school improvement plan. He wanted to strengthen existing bonds by continuing traditions that allowed for socialization such as the “Snackalty Meetings” that allowed faculty members the opportunity to socialize and snack before faculty meetings. The teachers of the first focus group acknowledged the “Snackalty Meetings” as contributing to the school’s climate, but also wanted more collaboration among teachers. Teachers also recognized and appreciated the principal’s open door policy that helps to build relationships. In this case, the perceptions were aligned regarding the principal’s efforts to build relationships to promote a positive school climate.

In the second participating school, the interviewed principal concentrated her efforts to build strong relationships with community business partners. She determined that relationships with business partners allowed her to promote a positive school climate by providing teachers with opportunities to meet after school hours to socialize. The teachers of the second focus group did not acknowledge business partner relationships as contributing to the climate of the school. In this case, perceptions of building relationships and communication were not aligned.

The principal of the third school also believed building relationships with community business partners was an important aspect of a positive school climate. She felt that her efforts to build those relationships provided teachers with opportunities to order lunches during school hours or to invite business partners into the school to teach lessons on specific topics. The teachers of the third focus group, similar to the second, did not acknowledge business partner relationships as contributing to the climate of the school. Furthermore, the teachers wanted the principal to listen to their ideas but felt the principal was not available to hear them.

Communication was difficult since the principal was frequently not available. In this case, the

perceptions of the principal and those of the teachers were not aligned with respect to building relationships and maintaining open communication.

In the fourth school, the principal described herself as a people-person-relationship-builder. Building relationships and communicating with her teachers were obviously key elements to this principal's creating and maintaining a positive school climate. Her open door policy, a priority in her schedule, continually allowed her to build strong relationships. She indicated that her relationship building began when she was an assistant principal at the same school. When she accepted the appointment as principal, she continued to build on the relationships she had started as an assistant principal. The teachers of this school's focus group agreed that their principal was a relationship builder. They appreciated her open door policy and believed the strong relationships contributed to the school's positive climate. In this case, the perceptions of the principal were aligned with those of the teachers.

Does the Alignment Differ Across Varying Achievement Levels?

Principal Leadership Styles

Regarding achievement levels and aligned perceptions of principal leadership styles, the second school had the highest overall state reported standard of learning scores of the participating schools. The principal's perception at this school and those of the interviewed teachers were not aligned. The first school, with the lowest of the participating schools reported state standardized test scores, and the third school, with the third highest of the participating schools reported state standardized test scores, the perceptions of the principals and teachers were not aligned. In the fourth school, with the second highest overall scores compared to the other participating schools, the perceptions were aligned.

Table 6 indicates the basic demographics, the pass rate of each school's state reported standardized test scores, and what each principal and corresponding teacher focus group perceived as the principal's leadership style thus indicating if perceptions were aligned or not.

Table 6

Summary of Leadership Style Perceptions and Student Achievement Levels

| Population: | 400 students 20 teachers | 480 students 26 teachers | 540 students 26 teachers | 620 students 29 teachers |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Pass rate of state reported standardized test scores: | English 86% Math 69% History 86% Science 93% | English 95% Math 90% History 95% Science 95% | English 88% Math 71% History 87% Science 88% | English 92% Math 76% History 92% Science 94% |
| Leadership Style | P: Shared T: Not Shared Perceptions did not align | P: Shared T: Authoritarian Perceptions did not align | P: Shared T: Top down Perceptions did not align | P: Shared T: Shared Perceptions did align |

Note: P = Principals, T=Teachers

Previous Principals' Actions

The perceptions of the teachers in the focus groups were mixed regarding the success of their current administrators to create or maintain a positive school climate based on the mirrored characteristics and efforts. While the interviewed principals generally followed the model they most admired in their former administrators, the teachers in three of the four focus groups did not perceive those efforts to be the best way to promote a positive school climate. Similar to the findings of previous researchers (Kelley et al., 2005), teachers' perceptions did not match those of the principals in three of the four participating schools, yet contrary to the literature, results in the fourth school indicated matching perceptions of the principal and teachers. Although contrary to the research regarding whether the perceptions of teachers and principals matched,

the findings did support those of Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) in that building relationships was an essential component of a positive school climate.

Table 7

Summary of Perceptions of Previous Principals' Actions and Achievement Levels

| Population: | 400 students 20 teachers | 480 students 26 teachers | 540 students 26 teachers | 620 students 29 teachers |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| Pass rate of state reported standardized test scores: | English 86% Math 69% History 86% Science 93% | English 95% Math 90% History 95% Science 95% | English 88% Math 71% History 87% Science 88% | English 92% Math 76% History 92% Science 94% |
| Previous Principals' Actions | P: Copied T: Agreed but did not acknowledge as contributing to climate | P: Copied T: Somewhat acknowledged | P: Copied some & learned from others T: Did not acknowledge | P: Copied T: Acknowledged |

Note: P=Principals, T=Teachers

To summarize, Table 7 demonstrates the basic demographics, the pass rate of each school's state reported standardized test scores, what each principal and corresponding teacher focus group discussed with regard to whether or not the principal copied previous principals' actions with respect to previous principals' actions, and how closely the teachers agreed or disagreed with the principals' perceptions. In the highest achieving participating school, the teachers only somewhat agreed with their principal regarding the actions she copied from previous principals. P2 contended the previous principal she most admired promoted teamwork and school wide decision making in an effort to improve the school's climate. P2 also recalled that her former principal acknowledged hard work and placed special treats in teachers' mailboxes. The teachers of the focus group agreed that P2 placed special treats in teachers'

mailboxes, but disagreed that she shared decision-making. In this case, responses were only somewhat aligned.

Teachers in the second highest achieving of the participating schools, the fourth school, perceived that their principal was a relationship builder just as the principal had described her former administrator. In this case, perceptions were aligned.

The principal of the third highest achieving of the participating schools, the third school, perceived that former administrators did not acknowledge the teachers in the school and that was to the detriment of the school's climate. P3 decided to learn from this and made it a goal of hers to call every teacher and student by name. The teachers in the focus group of this school did not acknowledge this action as contributing to the school's climate. In this case, the perceptions did not match.

The principal of the lowest achieving of the participating schools, the first school, described his most admired principal as one who was happy and joking. The teachers of this school's focus group described their principal with similar words, but did not perceive his actions as promoting a positive school climate. In this case, the perceptions were partially aligned.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Rewards.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of rewards, none of the perceptions was aligned regardless of student achievement levels. Again, the teachers who used the passes appreciated them; the teachers who did not use the passes did not appreciate them; and, none of the teachers whether or not they used the passes, believed they

contributed to the climate of the school. The principals perceived the passes did contribute to the schools' climate.

Recognition.

Regarding the student achievement levels and the alignment of principals and teachers' perceptions of recognition, the perceptions did not match in any of the cases. The principals perceived recognizing teachers as a means of contributing to the positive climate of the school. None of the teachers in the focus groups acknowledged recognition as part of the school's climate.

Traditions.

Regarding the student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of traditions, the two schools that indicated some agreement were the first and fourth schools that participated. The first school's state reported standardized test scores were the lowest compared to the other three participating schools. In this case, socializing before faculty meetings and the principal's singing and guitar playing were recognized by the principal and the teachers as contributors to the climate of the school. The fourth school's state reported standardized test scores were second highest compared to the other three participating schools. In this case, principal-planned opportunities for faculty members to socialize after school were recognized by the principal and teachers as contributors to the climate of the school.

Improving the School Climate

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of principals and teachers' perceptions of the schools' climate, the findings were mixed. The fourth participating school had the second highest state reported standardized test scores compared to the other three

participating schools. The principal's and teachers' perceptions were aligned in reference to not only the rating they gave the school's climate, but also the tone of the interviews. Both the principal and the interviewed teachers seemed enthusiastic and genuinely happy about their school.

In the first participating school, student achievement levels, based on state reported standardized test scores, were the lowest of the four participating schools. While the ratings the principal and teachers gave the school's climate were not perfectly aligned, they were only apart by one point with the principal rating the climate as three and the teachers a four out of a possible five points. The alignment difference was more apparent during the actual interviews. The tone of the principal was one of enthusiasm and belief that the school's climate was positive. The teachers, on the other hand, appeared less enthusiastic and less satisfied with the school's climate. The teachers gave much of the credit for the school's climate to the faculty members rather than the principal even though they rated his effectiveness as a four out of possible five points.

In the third participating school, as reported by the state standardized test scores, student achievement levels were third highest compared to those of the other three participating schools. Again, the principal's and teachers' perceptions were not aligned, but, again, were only separated by one point with the principal rating the climate as a four and the teachers a three out of a possible five points. As was the case in the first participating school, the numbers did not tell the whole story. The principal of this school seemed confident that the school's climate was positive, yet the teachers seemed dissatisfied with the climate. They rated the principal's effectiveness as a three out of a possible five points, but their overall tone was one of discontent.

The second participating school had the highest student achievement levels as reported by the state standardized test scores compared to the scores of the other three participating schools. The principal and teachers' perceptions were not aligned regarding the school's climate. The principal perceived the school's climate to be at a four of a possible five points, but the teachers rated it as either a two and one-half or a three. This focus group rating of the school's climate was the lowest of the four participating schools. The teachers of this focus group rated their principal's effectiveness as a three in terms of her efforts to create or maintain a positive school climate.

Principal visibility.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of principal visibility, the findings were mixed. In the first and fourth participating schools, where student achievement levels as reported by state standardized test scores were ranked lowest and the second highest, respectively, perceptions of the principals and teachers were aligned in that they agreed that principal visibility was necessary for a positive school climate.

In the second and third participating school, where student achievement levels based on state reported standardized test scores were the highest and third highest of the participating schools, the perceptions of teachers and the principal did not align. The principals did not indicate that visibility was a necessary part of the schools' climate, but the teachers did.

Table 8 summarizes the perceptions of the participating principals and teachers regarding the visibility of the principal. Table 8 indicates the basic demographics, the pass rates of each school's state reported standardized test scores, the principal and corresponding teacher focus groups' perceptions of visibility.

Table 8

Summary of Perceptions of Principal Visibility and Student Achievement Levels

| Population: | 400 students 20 teachers | 480 students 26 teachers | 540 students 26 teachers | 620 students 29 teachers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pass rate of state reported standardized test scores: | English 86% Math 69% History 86% Science 93% | English 95% Math 90% History 95% Science 95% | English 88% Math 71% History 87% Science 88% | English 92% Math 76% History 92% Science 94% |
| Visibility | P: More needed T: Agreed more was needed | P: Did not indicate a need T: Perceptions not aligned as teachers wanted more visibility | P: Perceived as visible T: Teachers disagreed Perceptions not aligned | P: Visibility important, more needed. T: Agreed it was important. Did not perceive more was needed |

Note: P=Principals, T=Teachers

Principal support.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of principals' and teachers' perceptions of support as a way to improve school climate, the fourth school which was second highest of the participating schools as reported by the state standardized test scores, presented the closest aligned perceptions. The interviewed principal and teachers of this school perceived that the principal's open-door policy contributed to the positive climate of the school and felt this was a means of supporting the teachers.

In schools two and three where student achievement levels, based on state reported standardized test scores, were highest and third highest of the four participating schools, the perceptions of support were not aligned. The principals felt they were offering what they could to support the teachers, but the teachers contended they did not feel supported and frequently felt they were left to fend for themselves.

In the first school, ranked lowest in student achievement of the participating schools, based on reported state standardized test scores, the teachers' and principal's perceptions were partially aligned. Perceptions matched in that the open-door policy maintained by the principal was considered as support that contributed to the climate of the school, but teachers did not indicate a strong bond with the principal as teachers of the fourth school did.

Table 9 is a summary of the perceptions of participating principals and teacher focus groups regarding principal support. Table 10 indicates the basic demographics, the pass rates of each school's state reported standardized test scores, and alignment of perceptions regarding support.

Table 9

Summary of Perceptions of Principal Support and Student Achievement Levels

| Population: | 400 students 20 teachers | | 480 students 26 teachers | | 540 students 26 teachers | | 620 students 29 teachers | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----|--|-----|--|-----|-----------------------------|-----|
| Pass rate of state reported standardized test scores: | English | 86% | English | 95% | English | 88% | English | 92% |
| | Math | 69% | Math | 90% | Math | 71% | Math | 76% |
| | History | 86% | History | 95% | History | 87% | History | 92% |
| | Science | 93% | Science | 95% | Science | 88% | Science | 94% |
| Support | Partially aligned | | Perceptions not aligned/ teachers did not feel supported | | Perceptions not aligned/ teachers did not feel supported | | Perceptions aligned | |

Relationship building and communication.

In reference to student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of relationship and communication, the findings were mixed. In the first and fourth schools, also the lowest and second highest, respectively, ranking of the participating schools in

terms of student achievement based on state reported standardized test scores, the principals' and interviewed teachers' perceptions were aligned because they believed building relationships and communication were important to improving the school's climate.

The second and third schools, respectively ranked highest and third highest in student achievement based on state reported standardized test scores of the participating schools, perceptions were not aligned. The principals of the second and third schools perceived building relationships with community businesses was important, but the interviewed teachers did not acknowledge this. The principal of the third school also attempted to build relationships by acknowledging teachers and student by name, but the teachers did not identify this as a contributor to the climate of the school.

Table 10 is a summary of the perceptions of participating principals and teacher focus groups regarding principal relationship building and communication. Table 10 indicates the basic demographics, the pass rates of each school's state reported standardized test scores, and alignment of principal and teacher focus group perceptions regarding relationship building and communication.

Table 10

Summary of Perceptions of Relationship Building and Communication and Student Achievement Levels

| Population: | 400 students 20 teachers | | 480 students 26 teachers | | 540 students 26 teachers | | 620 students 29 teachers | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|
| Pass rate of state reported standardized test scores: | English | 86% | English | 95% | English | 88% | English | 92% |
| | Math | 69% | Math | 90% | Math | 71% | Math | 76% |
| | History | 86% | History | 95% | History | 87% | History | 92% |
| | Science | 93% | Science | 95% | Science | 88% | Science | 94% |
| Relationship building and communication | Perceptions aligned | | Perceptions did not align | | Perceptions did not align | | Perceptions aligned | |

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summarized findings as well as conclusions and recommendations of the qualitative study designed to explore what principals do to create a positive school climate for teachers in elementary schools and how teachers perceive those efforts. The chapter is organized by the general research questions that guided the study. Themes and subthemes that emerged as a result of analyzing the findings are addressed within each general question heading where appropriate. In addition to study limitations, recommendations for practice and policy, recommendations for further research conclude the chapter. General questions that served as a guide for the study were:

- a) What intentional actions do elementary principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers?
- b) What are the elementary teachers' perceptions of the specific actions adopted by the principals to create a positive school climate?
- c) To what extent are the perceptions aligned?
- d) Does the alignment differ across varying achievement levels?

Table 11 summarizes the findings of this section. Found in this table are a brief description of the population demographics, the state reported standards of learning scores, and whether or not perceptions of the principal and teachers were aligned with respect to the various themes that emerged. Significant to this study, the perceptions were most aligned in the fourth school where the population was the highest, diversity was the greatest (based on Table 2), and scores were the second highest. Also noteworthy are the aligned perceptions in the first school where state reported standards of learning scores were the lowest of the participating schools.

Table 11

Summary of Perception Alignment with Demographics and Student Achievement Levels

| | School 1 | School 2 | School 3 | School 4 |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Population | 400 students 20 teachers | 480 students 26 teachers | 540 students 26 teachers | 620 students 29 teachers |
| State reported standards of learning scores | English 86% Math 69% History 86% Science 93% | English 95% Math 90% History 95% Science 95% | English 88% Math 71% History 87% Science 88% | English 92% Math 76% History 92% Science 94% |
| Leadership Description | P: Shared T: Not shared | P: Shared T: Authoritarian | P: Shared T: Top down | P: Shared T: Shared |
| Previous Principals' Actions | P: Copied T: agreed but did not acknowledge has helpful | P: Copied T: Somewhat agreed | P: Learned from T: did not acknowledge as helpful | P: Shared T: Shared |
| Rewards | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions did not align |
| Recognition | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions did not align |
| Traditions | Perceptions marginally aligned | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions marginally aligned | Perceptions marginally aligned |
| Visibility | P: More needed T: agreed | P: Did not indicate a need T: Perceptions did not align | P: Perceived as visible T: Perceptions did not align | P: More needed T: agreed |
| Support | Partially aligned | Perceptions not aligned. Teachers did not feel supported | Perceptions not aligned. Teachers did not feel supported | Perceptions aligned |
| Relationship & Communication | Perceptions aligned | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions did not align | Perceptions aligned |

Note: P=Principals, T=Teachers

Yellow shading indicates teachers and principals' perceptions were aligned. Pink shading indicates partial alignment.

What Intentional Actions Do Elementary Principals Adopt to Promote a Positive School

Climate for Teachers?

Principal Leadership Styles

The importance of the principal's role in creating or maintaining the climate of the school is well documented in research (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, Lee, 1982; Barth, 1986; Pallas, 1988;

Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1995; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, Dipaola, 2006; Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Williams, Persaud, & Turner, 2008; Cohen, McNabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010; Smith & Maika, 2008). As the leader of the school, the principal is in a unique position to largely control the climate (Barth, 1986; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al. 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Krakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Cohen et al., 2009). The principal has the ability to make key decisions that ultimately influence the teachers and the climate of the school. In this study, four elementary principals were asked to describe their leadership styles. Confidently and without hesitation, all four indicated either a shared or a collaborative style of leadership. The shared and collaborative leadership styles are explained in Lontos' (1992) study regarding transformational leaders.

Transformational leaders, as described by Lontos (1992) are principals who make a point of visiting every classroom each day while also making it possible for teachers to visit each other's rooms. They involve the entire staff in developing vision statements, goals, and beliefs at the beginning of the year. According to Lontos (1992), the transformational leader shared the power of making decisions with the teachers, allowing teams of teachers to take responsibility in decisions that will improve the school. Although Gallmeier (1992) did not find one leadership style more effective than any other style, he did conclude that the principal was the single most important person in creating an effective school. Kelley et al. (2005) suggested that the principals should be able to accurately determine his or her leadership style and understand the impact it has on the staff.

All of the participating principals in this study readily described their leadership style as either collaborative or shared decision-making. The descriptions they offered were consistent with the transformational leadership style described by Lontos (1992). All four of the principals declared that, aside from decisions regarding balancing the budget and pure safety, most other decisions were taken to the faculty for discussion and collaboration. The principals gave specific examples to support their claims. They cited surveys, small group discussions, round table discussions, and open-door policies that invited teachers to contribute to the decision-making process. Two of the principals indicated wanting to be in the classrooms more, but their open-door policy left them with little time to visit in classrooms daily.

One conclusion drawn from analyzing the statements of the principal of the fourth school, who described herself as a people-person, was that she developed meaningful relationships with her faculty members. The principal of this school estimated that 95% of the decisions were put before the faculty that then came to consensus before a final decision was made.

Overall, it is safe to conclude that the principals perceived themselves as leaders who collaboratively made most decisions based on input from their teachers. The principals believed this style of leadership to be effective in promoting a positive climate for their teachers. This conclusion is consistent with previous literature (Lontos, 1992; Lumsden, 1998; Kelley et al., 2005) that suggests a shared or transformational leadership style helps to promote a positive school climate.

Previous Principals' Actions

Since much research supported the notion that principals play a key role in determining the climate of the school (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, Lee, 1982; Barth, 1986; Pallas, 1988; Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1995; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005;

Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, Dipaola, 2006; Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Williams, Persaud, & Turner, 2008; Cohen, McNabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010; Smith & Maika, 2008), the current study explored whether administrators copied or rejected the perceived actions of their former principals. All four of the interviewed principals had taught prior to becoming administrators. They were asked to recall a favorite administrator they had while in the classroom. The interviewed principals described former administrators who valued teachers' opinions, trusted teachers, and empowered them by allowing them to be part of the decision-making process. Teamwork and support were also characteristics these principals recalled of their favorite administrators. The interviewed principal of the fourth school also commented that the principal she most admired maintained an open-door policy, promoted a positive relationship with teachers who in turn, felt at ease asking for help when needed.

The first interviewed principal described his favorite administrator as fun, happy, approachable, and someone who liked to joke around with his faculty. Later in the interview, he used many of these same traits to describe himself. He enjoyed laughing, having fun, and joking with his faculty and staff. The second principal recalled a former principal who promoted teamwork, allowed for school wide decision making, and acknowledged hard work with praise, special treats left in teachers' mailboxes, or school wide spirit days. These were activities that she employed as well to help build a positive school climate. The third principal recalled her favorite former principal as supportive and trusting of the staff. She remembered that her favorite former principal rewarded teachers' efforts with Jeans Passes and acknowledged accomplishments with the Golden Apple Award and shout-outs in in-house memorandums. The principal of the third school also noted that one of her former administrators did not

acknowledge faculty members on a regular basis. She recalled that this particular administrator would pass her in the halls and not acknowledge her existence. As P3 recalled, she then questioned herself and wondered if she had made the principal unhappy in some way. P3 felt strongly that this was to the detriment of the school's climate and decided to learn from it, making it a point to not only call faculty and staff members by name, but also the students of her school.

The fourth principal described the administrator she most admired as one who maintained an open-door policy and tried to create positive relationships with his faculty so they would trust him and feel comfortable going to him for help when needed. The principal of the fourth school emulated those qualities.

In determining whether principals copied or rejected efforts of previous administrators to create or maintain a positive school climate, the interviewed principals, overall, mirrored the efforts of the administrators they most admired. Research indicated (Kelley et al., 2005; Thomas, 1997) that the principal was in a key position in determining the climate of the school. Research also indicated (Arlestig, 2007; Bass, 1985; Egley & Jones, 2005; Halawah, 2005; Lontos, 1992; Kelley et al., 2005) that principal should be aware of their leadership style and carry out specific behaviors to establish and maintain an effective and successful school. Since the interviewed principals perceived that their former principals were effective in creating a positive school climate, it stands to reason the interviewed principals chose to mimic those actions and leadership styles in an effort to create or maintain a positive school climate of their own.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Rewards.

Rewards or incentives were identified in this study as tangible tokens of appreciation given by principals to faculty members for participation in an activity beyond the typical and expected day-to-day teaching activities such as participation in a school-sponsored event. Examples of events included staying after normal school hours to participate in a parent workshop, donating to a district wide charity, or volunteering at an arts and science festival on a Saturday. Principals frequently rewarded teachers with Jeans Passes, Leave Early Passes, or Spirit Days. Jeans Passes were coupons given to teachers that they could redeem whenever they wanted to wear jeans to school; an otherwise frowned upon attire choice. Leave Early Passes were coupons given to teachers that they could redeem whenever they wanted to leave school twenty-five to thirty minutes early. Spirit Days were usually awarded to an entire grade level, group, or the entire school and invited teachers to wear jeans to school along with school spirit wear.

In conclusion, rewarding teachers with Jeans Passes, Leave Early Passes, or Spirit Days when teachers performed activities not included in their normal teaching day, was an intentional action adopted by principals to promote a positive school climate. The principals perceived that teachers appreciated the rewards or incentives and that the rewards helped to create or maintain positive school climate.

Recognition.

In contrast to rewards that were usually a tangible object meant as an incentive to motivate or encourage teachers, recognition was determined to be praise for a teacher who had performed a typical task in a superior way. Recognition was revealed in the literature as one way to promote a positive school climate (Anderman et al., 1991; Lontos, 1992; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). In the current study, principals sometimes

publically recognized efforts of teachers at a faculty meeting or at other times, privately placed a written note in an individual teacher's mailbox. Recognition was sometimes encouraged by the administrator, but was actually given by one teacher to another in the form of the Golden Apple Award or the Coke and a Compliment. Other forms of recognition included Teacher of the Year Award given to one teacher in each school each year, "shout outs" in the weekly in-school newsletter or during morning announcements, and personal notes left in teachers' mailboxes.

In conclusion, to describe what intentional actions elementary principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers, the participating principals of the current study suggested teacher recognition. The interviewed principals recognized teachers both publicly and privately and encouraged teachers to recognize the efforts of each other too. This is consistent with the literature (Anderman et al., 1991; Lontos, 1992; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008) that suggestions recognition of teacher accomplishments is one way to create or maintain a positive school climate.

Traditions.

Traditions occurred in all of the participating schools and emerged as one way that principals intentionally try to create or maintain a positive school climate. Some of the traditions had already been in place prior to the interviewed principal's appointment, while others developed as a result of the interviewed principal.

Principals noted several traditions at their schools. Although the literature did not support traditions, as described in this study, as a means of creating or maintaining a positive school climate, one study did comment that principals had to build a good rapport with the teachers in order to have a positive climate (Pepper & Thomas, 2002). Traditions might be one way to build a good rapport.

Examples of traditions included the principal shaking students' hands at the beginning of each day. The principal of the first school shook each child's hand every day with the belief that it gave the students a good start for each day and that this in turn helped the teachers to have a good day. The principals of the first and third schools included preparing meals for teachers throughout the school year as another tradition they adopted with the specific intention of creating or maintaining a positive school climate for their teachers. Principals of the participating schools intentionally planned specific times for teachers to socialize with one another either on or off school grounds in an effort to promote a positive school climate for teachers. The principal for the first school employed singing songs to the teachers in an effort to boost the school's climate when coming back to school at the end of summer break was sometimes difficult for teachers. The principals of the first and second schools indicated they host turkey or egg hunts for teachers as a means to create or maintain a positive school climate. They believed the activities to be enjoyed by teachers and perceived that the activities did boost the climate of the school since participation was high each year.

Improving the School Climate

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

Kelley et al. (2005) found that teachers frequently had perceptions about the climate of the school that were different from those of the principal. In a study conducted by Pashiardis et al. (2005), however, teacher and principal perceptions were closely matched. The discrepancy might be explained by the differing circumstances of the studies. Traditionally, principals are hired by executives in a central office with little or no input from the teachers. Pashiardis et al. (2005) conducted their study in a secondary school where the principal was elected by his or her peers to serve a three-year term and where the teachers' input determined if the principal

remained in that position or returned to the classroom at the end of each term. It was, professionally, to the principal's advantage to stay aware of teachers' perceptions.

In the current study, principals were given the opportunity to rate their schools' climate on a scale of one to five, with five being the perfect school climate. The overall feeling of the principals was that their schools climate, while not perfect, was in a good position. Some believed that even though they did not consider perfection attainable, it was a goal toward which they could strive. Others believed perfection was not possible and, therefore, not worth considering as a realistic goal for school climate.

In the first school, the principal rated his school's climate as three and indicated that he did not believe a perfect climate was possible but that it was something for which he could strive. He maintained that he had only been at the school for three years, but realized that improving the school's climate was an important aspect of his position as the principal. This belief was supported in the research (Kelley et al., 2005; Gulsen, 2014; Thomas, 1997; Anderman et al., 1991).

In the second school, the principal rated the school's climate as four and indicated that a perfect climate was not attainable and therefore not a goal of hers. She appeared confident that the school's climate was good and believed she intentionally committed to numerous activities that provided a positive school climate for her teachers. P2 also acknowledged that the school's climate was a work in progress and there was always room for improvement.

In the third school, the principal rated the school's climate as four. Similar to the second principal, she did not believe a perfect climate was ever attainable since there was no way to make everyone happy all of the time. Still, she believed the overall climate of her school was positive for her teachers.

In the fourth school, the principal rated her school's climate as three and one-half. She did not dispute the reality of a perfect school climate. P4 believed the intentional relationships she had built over the years were keys to the positive school climate and planned to continue to build on those. Her experience as an assistant principal for several years prior to becoming the principal afforded her the opportunity to build those relationships over time.

In conclusion, the principals of all of the participating schools believed their schools' climates to be positive. Two principals did not believe a perfect school climate was possible and therefore did not plan to strive for that goal. The other two principals believed a perfect school climate might not be attainable, but felt striving for perfection was at least in the right direction.

Principal visibility.

The individual principals and the teacher focus groups described principal visibility as one way to promote a positive climate for the schools. This supports the findings of Salisbury and McGregor (2002) and Devos and Bouckennooghe (2009) that suggested a positive school climate was more likely when principals showed support by frequently visiting teachers' classrooms.

In the current study, interviewed principals of the first and fourth schools indicated a desire to be in the classrooms more frequently but felt torn by their open-door policy. While they valued their open-door policy and believed it contributed to the building of strong relationships with faculty and community members, they also realized that the same time-consuming policy made it difficult for them to leave their offices and frequently visit classrooms and other areas of the school.

While the principal of the second school did not indicate principal visibility as a means of promoting a positive climate, the principal of the third school did. P3 described herself as one who was in the trenches, one who was already visible.

After analyzing the qualitative data, the conclusion was made that three of the four principals viewed visibility as a significant means to improving or maintaining their schools' climates. This was consistent with the literature (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009) that suggested a positive school climate was more likely when principals frequently visited teachers' classrooms.

Additionally, while the principals might understand the need for more visibility, the other demands of the administrator's position prevent them from meeting that need. Principals who maintain an open-door policy where they invite and encourage faculty, staff, parents, and community members to frequent their offices, to have conversations, and to build relationships also create a problem for themselves in that they simply run out of time during the school day to visit classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias.

Principal support.

Support for classroom teachers emerged as a recommendation of teachers and principals to improve the climate of the schools. Teachers and principals agreed that support was necessary but consistency regarding the specifics was lacking. Principal support was suggested in previous studies by Pepper and Thomas (2002) when they found a good rapport between teachers and administrators was necessary for a positive school climate. Principals in the current study explained several means of supporting teachers that they perceived as contributing to the positive climate of the school. Two principals, P1 and P4, described support as not only being visible in the classrooms but also physically helping teachers in the classrooms. One principal perceived

that giving the teachers more time to complete work was a method to promote the school's positive climate. In fact, P3 arranged for teachers to have free time while she and the assistant principal supervised the classrooms for an hour. P3 and P4 also wanted to remove unnecessary responsibilities from teachers thus allowing teachers more time to actually educate students. Finally, P3 perceived support as advocating for an improved physical space of the school.

Two conclusions were drawn after analyzing the qualitative data regarding support as a means of increasing the positive climate of a school. First, principals perceived that supporting teachers was one method administrators could adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers. Second, the principals' perceptions of support were different from one another. Support might need to be different in individual schools because the needs of the teachers will dictate the kind of support necessary. For example, the principal of the second school probably did not perceive renovating the school as a means of supporting her teachers because the school was relatively new. Contrary, the principal of the third school probably perceived advocating for renovations as a means of supporting her teachers because parts of the school were nearly 80 years old and in need of paint or other cosmetic repairs and updates. Thus, principals might have different perceptions of support based on the needs of their teachers.

Relationship building and communication.

Building strong relationships and maintaining open lines of communication were frequently mentioned by principals and teachers as means of promoting a positive climate in their schools. This is consistent with the findings of Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) that indicated principals needed to build a sense of trust with their faculty in order to have a positive climate. Additionally, the current study supports the findings of Anderman et al. (1991) and Karakose (2008) in that principals need to develop a sense of respect between faculty

members and administrators in order to build a positive school climate. Communication was deemed important in the literature (Halawah, 2005; Arlestig, 2007; Pepper & Thomas, 2002) and was supported by the current study.

The interviewed principal of the first school, who had only been there for three years, acknowledged he had room to grow in the area of relationship building with his faculty and staff. In fact, indicating the importance of building relationships, the principal made getting to know his faculty and staff a part of his school climate improvement plan. This was an intentional action he wanted to include in order to promote a positive school climate. He felt he still needed to get to know the faculty members better before making decisions regarding changes to grade level placements. Another intentional action this principal dedicated to promoting a positive school climate for teachers, was the open-door policy he maintained in an effort to build those relationships with teachers and to encourage communication. An additional intentional action adopted by P1 to promote a positive school climate for teachers were his efforts to provide teachers with opportunities to build relationships with one another by allowing time for them to socialize before faculty meetings.

The principals of the second and third schools felt passionately that building strong relationships with community business owners helped to build a positive school climate. In a study conducted by Mullen and Patrick (2000), it was suggested that the principal should work closely with community business partners to build a positive school climate. In their study, the principal worked directly with a church to provide food and clothing for children in need. In the current study, the interviewed principals did not describe charitable work, but rather relationships with business owners that would help to boost teacher morale and promote a positive school climate. For example, an intentional action adopted by the principal of the second school to

promote a positive school climate for teachers was that she arranged for one community business partner to provide complimentary appetizers and a place for teachers to congregate and socialize after school hours in an effort to increase the school's climate. In the third school, the principal contacted the business partners to provide lunch at school for the teachers during the school day. This was an intentional action adopted by the principal to promote a positive school climate for teachers. Sometimes, the lunches were paid for by funding the principal had access to and other times, the lunches were paid for by the teachers, but were still an opportunity for teachers to enjoy lunch from someplace other than the school cafeteria.

In the third school, the principal tried to build relationships by learning teachers and students' names. She felt that an important way to promote a positive school climate was to recognize each person and call him or her by name. She intentionally adopted this practice in an effort to promote a positive school climate for teachers.

In the fourth school, building relationships was vital to the principal's positive school climate. She believed that, to her advantage, she had been an assistant principal at this school for several years before being appointed principal and had been able to develop strong relationships with the faculty and staff members. She intentionally maintained an open-door policy as a principal and reasoned that teachers felt comfortable coming to her with questions and concerns on a personal as well as a professional level.

What are the Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Specific Actions Adopted by the Principals to Create a Positive School Climate?

Principal Leadership Styles

In this study, teachers were asked to describe their principal's leadership style to determine if their perceptions aligned with their principal's perceptions. Significant to the

current study, the teachers of the first, second, and third focus groups, who were unaware of their principals' responses, perceived their administrators' leadership styles differently. They felt their principals were closer to a top-down management style rather than a collaborative one. These focus groups indicated that while their principals asked for input, the perception was that the teachers' input was inconsequential because the principal had already made a decision. The teachers of the focus group of the fourth school, who were also unaware of their principal's responses, were the only ones who agreed with their principal in that not only did the principal seek input from teachers, but also she truly considered the input when making decisions.

The description the fourth teacher focus group gave of their principal was much closer to the transformational type leader described by Lontos (1992) than the descriptions given by any other focus group. Additionally, this focus group supported the research of Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) in that building a sense of trust and having a good rapport between the administration and the teachers was important to a positive school climate.

Previous Principals' Actions

Evident in much of the research was the notion that principals play a key role in determining the climate of the school (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, Lee, 1982; Barth, 1986; Pallas, 1988; Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1995; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Hofstrand, 2003; Kelley et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, Dipaola, 2006; Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007; Karakose, 2008; Pohlen, 2008; Williams, Persaud, & Turner, 2008; Cohen, McNabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010; Smith & Maika, 2008). The current study explored whether administrators copied or rejected the perceived actions of their former principals. Their descriptions are located in the previous section. Teachers' descriptions of their principals shed light on the comparison

of the principals' perceptions and whether or not they copied or rejected previous principals' actions to promote a positive school climate.

The teachers of the first focus group described a principal who was similar to their principal's favorite former administrator. They perceived him as a happy person who enjoyed laughing, joking, and singing. They perceived him as almost too positive in that they thought he avoided confrontation. The teachers of this focus group perceived this as a fault because while they desired constructive feedback from the principal, they did not receive any. They described their evaluations as too positive and wanted to hear from their principal areas where he believed they could improve.

The principal of the second school described a former principal as one who promoted teamwork, allowed for school wide decision making, and acknowledged hard work with praise, special treats left in teachers' mailboxes, and school wide spirit days. These were activities she believed she mirrored in trying to create or maintain a positive school climate for teachers. The teachers of the second focus group acknowledged the efforts of the principal and agreed that she left special treats and encouraged school wide spirit days. The teachers did not acknowledge teamwork efforts of the principal and disagreed that she allowed for school wide decision making.

The principal of the third participating school described a former admired administrator as one who trusted her to do her job, and recognized and rewarded teachers for their accomplishments. The teachers of the third school's focus group perceived their principal's efforts as inconsistent. Through no fault of her own, the principal had not been in the building for several months at a time. The teachers understood her absences were not preventable, but still desired consistency in the management of the school. From one year to the next,

expectations changed, sending a confusing message to teachers regarding priorities. The position of the assistant principal had not remained constant during the principal's absences. This contributed to even more teacher confusion and the perceived expectation that they were to make decisions without administrative guidance. Climate, according to the teachers, suffered under the lack of direction and administrative leadership of the last two years, in spite of the efforts of the principal when she was at school.

The principal of the fourth school described her favorite former administrator as one who made every attempt to be visible throughout the school day, welcomed feedback from teachers, and maintained an open-door policy by which he established strong relationships with teachers. The teachers of the fourth focus group perceived similar actions of their current principal indicating some mirroring. They acknowledged their principal's efforts to maintain an open-door policy and to build strong relationships.

Based on the qualitative data collected from this study, certain conclusions may be drawn. Principals acknowledged and copied actions of former administrators that they deemed as contributing to a positive school climate. Teachers of the current study were able to recognize some of the same traits in their current administrator but they did not recognize all of the traits as described by their principals. Further, the teachers did not perceive many of the described traits as contributing to a positive school climate.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Rewards.

In this study, rewards or incentives were identified as tangible tokens of appreciation given by principals to faculty members for participation in an activity beyond the typical and expected day-to-day teaching activities such as participation in a school-sponsored event.

The overwhelming opinion of the teachers was that, while they appreciated the rewards, they felt the rewards did not help to create or maintain a positive school climate. Teachers indicated that less tangible elements were more important than Jeans Passes or Leave Early Passes. Some teachers did not prefer to wear jeans and some did not own jeans, making the Jeans Passes neither motivating nor rewarding to that population of teachers. Interviewed teachers described a similar sentiment toward the Leave Early Passes. Some teachers had too much work to do to take advantage of the passes to leave school early.

Teachers in three of the four focus groups recognized the passes as an attempt by the principal to improve the climate of the school and they genuinely appreciated the effort, but believed the passes were ineffective in building or sustaining a positive climate. The teachers of one focus group compared the passes to treats parents might offer their children after the parents have been away from home. The children like the candy, but what they need is for their parents to be home. While teachers appreciated the passes, they would have preferred their administrators to be present.

The conclusion drawn after analyzing the data regarding rewards for teachers as contributing to the climate of the school was that teachers recognized and appreciated the efforts of the principals. Further, it was concluded that teachers wanted the option of leaving early, wearing jeans, or participating in a spirit day, but did not perceive the rewards as contributors to the climate of the school. Additionally, some of the teachers did not wear jeans and some were not able to leave early because of school related obligations. The works of Rhodes et al. (2009) and Kelley et al. (2005) are supported by these findings indicating the importance of principals being aware of the perceptions of the teachers.

Recognition.

When teachers were asked to describe the actions their principals adopted to create or maintain a positive school climate, none of the teachers in the focus groups acknowledged the examples the principals gave or any other forms of recognition.

After analyzing the qualitative data of this study, one conclusion drawn was that the teachers did not perceive the recognition activities the principals employed as meaningful or as contributing to the climate of the school. This was contrary to the literature that suggested recognition as one way to promote a positive school climate (Anderman et al., 1991; Lontos, 1992; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). A further conclusion was made that it was possible that none of the teachers who participated in the focus group interviews had received recognition from the principals and therefore did not perceive it as contributing to the climate of the school.

Traditions.

When asked what their principals specifically did to create or maintain a positive school climate for teachers, teachers indicated just four of the numerous traditions outlined by the principals. The teachers of the first focus group indicated the efforts of their principal to help them socialize by organizing the “Snackalty Meetings.” They also recognized his guitar playing and singing as an attempt to create or maintain a positive school climate. The teachers in the third focus group recognized their principal’s efforts to make Teacher Appreciation Week special for them and determined this as one way she tried to promote a positive school climate. Teachers in the fourth focus group described their principal’s efforts to organize after school social events to help promote a positive school climate.

The alignment of teachers’ perceptions with those of the principals’ regarding the efforts made by principals to create or maintain a positive school climate through traditions was

marginal. While rewards and recognition might have been experienced by a select group of teachers, traditions were open to all faculty members. Still, the interviewed teachers did not indicate many of the traditions as contributing to the climate of the school.

Improving the School Climate

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

When asked to rate their schools' climate on a scale of one to five, with five being the perfect school climate, teacher ratings of the schools' climate ranged from two to four and one-half, depending on the school. Teachers of three of the four focus groups described a positive climate where teachers had positive attitudes and worked well together thus contributing to the reason the climate was positive. They asserted that the principal's efforts were not responsible for the climate being as positive as it was. The teachers determined that it was the teachers who maintained the school's positive climate, sometimes in spite of the administration. The teachers believed that a different faculty might not be as positive as the current faculty, therefore creating a less than desirable climate. This finding is contrary to much of the literature (Kelley et al., 2005; Thomas, 1997; Anderman et al., 1991; Gallmeier, 1992) that pointed to the principal as the key to the school's climate. Interviewed teachers suggested that the positive school climate was a result of the teachers with positive attitudes who worked well together and who have formed strong bonds with each other. Three of the four schools' focus groups believed their faculty was unique in that the faculty was unusually strong and positive.

The fourth participating school had a different perception about the relationship of the school's climate and the principal. They perceived the principal's efforts as contributing to the climate of the school. They acknowledged there was room for improvement, but overall, they were satisfied with the climate.

Conclusions were drawn as a result of the qualitative data gathered in this study. It is possible, but not probable that the first three schools have populations of teachers who are as unique as the teachers believed they are. Contrary to the literature that indicated the principal as the key figure in creating or maintaining a school's positive climate (Kelley et al., 2005; Thomas, 1997; Anderman et al., 1991), the teachers of the first three focus groups indicated that the school's positive climate had little to do with the efforts of the principal and more to do with the relationships developed and shared by the teachers. While this is possible, other explanations might be more plausible. For example, perhaps any group of teachers would develop strong relationships. Teachers are connected to each other by the nature of their careers. They share similar hardships and demands created by the work environment, administrators, parents, and sometimes students.

Another plausible conclusion for the positive school climate of the schools is that the principals' efforts are helping to maintain positive school climate. In general, the teachers agreed that they enjoyed the traditions, rewards, and recognitions, but did not associate them with the positive climate of the school. Significantly, in the fourth school, the focus group seemed to have a more positive opinion of their principal and her efforts. They gave her credit for the positive climate of the school and acknowledged her efforts with affirmative comments.

Principal visibility.

When asked to describe ways the principal could improve the climate of the school, the teachers of some of the focus groups perceived principal visibility as one method. This supports the findings of Salisbury and McGregor (2002) and Devos and Bouckennooghe (2009) that suggested a positive school climate was more likely when principals showed support by frequently visiting teachers' classrooms.

The first focus group had mixed remarks about the visibility of their principal. One of the teachers lamented that she hardly saw the principal and indicated she would like him to be more visible in the classrooms. Another teacher in the same focus group stated that he came to her room frequently.

Teachers of the second focus group agreed that they rarely saw their principal. They commented that she was frequently out of the building with mandatory meetings, but that even when she was in the building, she did not visit classrooms, hallways, or the cafeteria. The teachers of this focus group indicated that student behavior and the noise level in the cafeteria suffered because of the lack of principal visibility in that area of the school. One of the teachers commented that her students were not able to identify the principal even by the end of the year because they saw her so rarely.

The teachers of the third focus group perceived their principal made an effort to be visible, but that effort needed to be more consistent and involve all students. They commented that she was selectively visible and selectively interactive with students who had suffered some kind of traumatic event such as the loss of a parent or the experience of a difficult home life.

The teachers of the fourth focus group did not indicate a desire for increased principal visibility. They seemed to understand that her open door policy made it difficult for her to leave her office.

In conclusion, principal visibility was important to most of the teachers in the focus groups. This supports the findings of Salisbury and McGregor (2002) and Devos and Bouckennooghe (2009) that indicated a school climate was more likely to be positive when principals showed support by frequently visiting teachers' classrooms. Overall, teachers wanted

their principals to be consistently more visible. It is reasonable to conclude that teachers perceive principal visibility as a significant means to improve the climate of a school.

Principal support.

Principal support was suggested in previous studies by Pepper and Thomas (2002) when they found a good rapport between teachers and administrators was necessary for a positive school climate. This was supported by the current study, in part, when teachers, especially of the fourth school, acknowledged the importance of feeling comfortable enough to seek help from their principal with concerns either professional or personal in nature.

Teachers felt supported by their principals when they perceived the principal listened to and valued the teachers. The open-door policy that was so much a part of two of the principals' daily routine was recognized by the teachers of those focus groups and appreciated. The teachers, especially of the fourth school, felt a strong connection with the principal and a high level of trust. The teachers of this focus group perceived that they could go to their principal and openly discuss any concerns. They acknowledged her open-door policy as contributing to the positive climate of the school.

The lack of perceived support was most notable in schools two and three where teachers believed their opinions and ideas were not appreciated, heard, nor valued. Teachers in these two focus groups sounded frustrated with the lack of availability of their administrators. In the second school, the teachers of the focus group perceived that even when the principal was at school, she was not available. They perceived her lack of availability as a lack of support.

The teachers of the third focus group expressed similar concerns except they did acknowledge that their principal was unavailable and out of the building for reasons beyond her control. The frustration they felt came from several sources. One source was the understood, yet

still frustrating, unavailability of their administrator. Another source of frustration, as perceived by the teachers, was the lack of consistency teachers experienced with expectations during the principal's extended absences. Finally, the teachers were frustrated by a perceived lack of support from their administrator when she was present in that they believed their opinions and ideas were neither heard nor valued.

For teachers, support was perceived as feeling valued, appreciated, and heard by administrators. Unfortunately, communicating this perception to the principals might be difficult if the teachers perceive the principals do not listen.

Relationship building and communication.

Building strong relationships and maintaining open lines of communication were mentioned by teachers as a means of promoting a positive school climate. This is consistent with the findings of Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) that indicated principals needed to build a sense of trust with their teachers to promote a positive school climate.

Teachers of the first focus group acknowledged the principal's efforts to provide teachers with opportunities to socialize and build relationships with one another. They acknowledged and appreciated the principal's open-door policy. They appreciated the principal's efforts, but also wanted more time to collaborate in the classrooms with each other.

The teachers who participated in the focus groups at schools two and three did not recognize the principals' efforts to build strong relationships. The principals of schools two and three tried to build relationships through the contacts made with the community business partners.

The teachers of the fourth focus group agreed that relationships were strong between the faculty members and the administrators and likened the environment to that of a family. They

attributed the strong relationships to the principal's open-door policy and her commitment to build relationships with staff and faculty. Even though the teachers felt the relationships were strong, they still desired not only more opportunities for socializing outside of school, but also more teachers who were willing to do so.

To What Extent Are the Perceptions Aligned?

Defining Climate

To ascertain participants' understanding of the meaning of *climate*, all were asked to define it in their own words. All of the participants understood what the climate of the school was; all were able to provide a definition, but no two definitions were identical. Even the basic components of what should be included when discussing the climate of a school differed from one individual to the next. These findings were similar to those in the literature in that even though it is apparent that most know and understand what climate is, *climate* is difficult to define and vague in meaning. Anderson (1982), Cohen et al. (2009), Dixon, Johnson, and Toman (1991), Johnson, Dixon, and Edens (1992), Hoy et al. (1991), Holdaway and Johnson (1993), Marshal (2004), Johnson and Stevens (2006), Syvertsen, Flanagan, and Stout (2009), Zullig et al. (2010) all concluded that no single definition exists for school *climate* even though there appears to be a general understanding of the term. The principal and teacher participants of the current study defined *climate* in terms of an overall mood or feel, the environment of a school that could be either positive or negative. They collectively contributed that in defining the climate of the school, the perceptions of faculty, staff, students, and parents needed to be considered in addition to the attitudes of the stakeholders. The interviewed teachers also wanted to include the way teachers, administrators, students, and visitors felt once they had entered the building as necessary to consider when trying to define the climate of a school.

When asked to describe the components included in determining the climate of a school, the participants offered a variety of responses, consistent with results found in the literature. Physical space was included by one principal and one teacher as being important in determining the climate of a school. Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Wolsey (2009) reported similar results in their study, indicating the importance of aesthetics in relationship to the climate of the school and the productivity of the teachers and students. One interviewed principal specifically noted that she thought productivity of teachers would be higher in schools that appeared newer. Similar to results found in studies by Anderman et al. (1991), Salisbury and McGregor (2002), and Grayson and Alvarez (2008), the interviewed teachers and principals agreed that feeling valued, appreciated, and recognized were significant components to the climate of the school. Some teachers also believed the comfort level of teachers asking for assistance from colleagues and administrators was an important component to include in determining the climate of a school. Principals and teachers indicated that working together as a staff was a significant component of school climate, but teachers also included the interactions of teachers among other teachers, of teachers among administrators, of teachers among children, and of children among children. Previous researchers who indicated similar findings were Hoy (1990), Menon and Christou (2002), Arlestig (2007), and Halawah (2005) who suggested communication to be an important component when considering climate as well as shared values, and positive relationships.


Table 12

Comparison of Definitions and Components of Climate

| | Kelley et al. (2005) | Halpin & Croft (1963) | Hoy et al. (2002) | Brookove r et al. (1978) | Gunba yi (2007) | Gottfre dson et al. (2005) | Menon & Christo u (2002) | Arles tig (200 7) | Hoy (199 0) | Uline et al. (2009) | Fisher et al. (1986) | Lubienski et al. (2008) | Barke et al. (2006) | Bradshaw et al. (2008) | Halawah (2005) | P | T |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|
| Communication | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Decision-making | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Innovation | X | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Advocacy | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Evaluation | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Staff development | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Relationships b/t & among teachers, administrators, & students | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Academic norms, beliefs, & expectations | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Socio-economic status & race | | | | X | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Organizational clarity & standards | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Team commitment | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Autonomy | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Intimacy | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Support | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Member Conflict | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rewards | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Recognition | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Risks | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fairness of rules | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Clarity of rules | | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Common goals | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Staff morale | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Planning | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Administrative leadership | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communication | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Perceptions of behaviors | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Physical building | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | X | X |
| Work pressure | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | X |
| Parent involvement | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| School wide behavior intervention | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| School personality | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Teachers' perceptions of the overall work environment | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Perceptions of staff, students, parents | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Safety | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Nurture | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Shared values | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Overall mood or feeling | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Comfort Level | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Way people feel once inside the building | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Feeling value; appreciated | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Feeling your work is meaningful | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Attitudes of teachers & administrators | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Responsibilities of teachers | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |

Note: X indicates alignment in defining *climate* or including components.

 indicates no alignment in defining *climate* or including components.

In terms of defining *climate* and determining components to include, this study reflected the findings of previous studies. Although participants in this study knew what school *climate*

was and were able to suggest meaningful components that should be considered when determining the climate of a school, no two definitions were completely alike. Supporting evidence was found in many studies that were conducted by a variety of researchers over the course of several decades found most people knew what *climate* was and were able to discuss it even though the actual definitions of the word were vague (Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Dixon et al., 1991; Johnson et al., 1992; Hoy, 1991; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Marshall, 2004; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Syvertsen et al., 2009; Zullig et al., 2010).

Table 12 outlines the previous researchers, principals, and teachers' responses regarding defining school climate and including components of school climate. It is important to note that the highlighted areas on the table indicate where responses did not overlap. This occurred 95% of the time. Areas where responses were aligned are marked with an X. Of the 43 outlined categories defining climate or contributing to the components that should be included when considering the climate of the school according to participants and previous researchers, participating teachers and principals' answers aligned just 16% of the time.

In a study conducted by Anderson in 1982, it was determined that school climate had been studied for years from many different points of view using a variety of variables, models, theories, and methodologies, yet remained difficult to define. Hoy (1990) later concluded that school climate had become part of the standard vocabulary used to discuss education and the effectiveness of education. He found that people use the term because they seem to have an instinctive sense of the meaning yet no one definition had been agreed upon by scholars.

The current study yielded similar results in that all of the participants knew what school *climate* was, but no two definitions were identical. Participants individually contributed definitions and it was obvious they all had a firm understanding of the word, but did not

completely agree on one definition, leaving the meaning vague as in previous studies.

Participants also did not completely agree on the components that should be included when considering a school's climate. Interestingly, focus group participants did not correct one another or even disagree with one another regarding the definition or components of *climate*, but rather seemed accepting of each other's opinions and descriptions.

Principal Leadership Styles

Although three of the interviewed principals believed they were leaders who involved their faculty members in the decision-making process and were able to give specific and detailed examples to support their claims, the teachers of the focus groups perceived their principals to be more along the line of authoritarian than transformational in leadership style. The perceptions of the teachers were not aligned, in this case, with the efforts and perceptions of the principals. This points to the 2005 study of Kelley et al. in that principals need to be able to accurately identify their leadership style and be aware of the impact it has on the faculty.

The principal of the first school indicated several opportunities teachers had to contribute to decisions, but the teachers perceived those opportunities as hollow. The teachers acknowledged that the principal asked for their input, but they believed that he had already made up his mind prior to presenting options to the faculty. In fact, they perceived that options were presented in a lopsided manner as if to make the option he had already chosen appear to be the best.

The principal of the second school believed she allowed for shared decision-making and described her leadership style as collaborative. The teachers of this school's focus group perceived her style as more authoritarian or top-down where directives are given and expected to be followed with little or no input from subordinates.

In the third school, the principal also described her leadership style as collaborative and gave examples of circumstances when she has specifically asked for teacher input before making decisions. Again, teachers perceived the principal as one who primarily made her own decisions with little input from the faculty.

The fourth principal described herself as a people person who actively sought teacher input. Teachers offered a similar description. In this school, teacher perceptions were consistent with principal perceptions.

Previous Principals' Actions

In determining whether principals copied or rejected efforts of previous administrators to create or maintain a positive school climate, the interviewed principals, overall, mirrored the efforts of the administrators they most admired. Since the interviewed principals perceived that their former principals were effective in creating a positive school climate, it stands to reason the interviewed principals chose to mimic those actions.

The perceptions of the teachers in the focus groups were mixed regarding the success of their current administrators to create or maintain a positive school climate based on the mirrored characteristics and efforts of their principals. While the interviewed principals generally followed the model of previous administrators they admired, the teachers in three of the four focus groups did not perceive those efforts to be the best way to promote a positive school climate. Similar to the findings of Kelley et al. (2005), teachers' perceptions did not match those of the principals in three of the four participating schools. Contrary to the literature, however, results in the fourth school indicated matching perceptions of the principals and teachers. Although contrary to the research regarding whether the perceptions of teachers and principals

matched, the findings did support those of Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) in that building relationships was an essential component of a positive school climate.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Rewards.

The important conclusion determined by analyzing the qualitative data regarding rewards is that the rewards, as described the teachers and principals of this study, were appreciated but only viewed as helpful to the climate of the schools by the principals. The works of Rhodes et al. (2009) and Kelley et al. (2005) are supported by these findings indicating the importance of principals being aware of the perceptions of the teachers. Generally, teachers who enjoyed the passes were the ones who were willing to work for and who actually used the passes. Teachers who did not enjoy the passes were people who were not able to use them because they did not wear jeans and/or were not able to leave school early because of school-related obligations. Therefore, rewards, although appreciated by some teachers, were not perceived by teachers as a major contributor to a positive school climate. The perceptions of the principals and those of the teachers were not aligned.

Recognition.

Principals perceived that recognizing teachers for superior efforts was one way to create or maintain a positive climate. Although research supported this perception (Anderman et al., 1991; Lontos, 1992; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008), the interviewed teachers did not reference recognition when asked to discuss what their principals did to create or maintain a positive climate.

Several conclusions were drawn from the discrepancies in the perceptions. It is possible that principals thought about the Golden Apple Award more because they initiated and

encouraged it. Participating teachers might not have been recipients of this form of recognition and therefore did not place value on it.

The Coke and a Compliment idea was theoretically a way for teachers to recognize publicly each other's efforts. Unfortunately, the recognition took place during faculty meetings. For the introverted person, speaking publicly, even to a group of colleagues, can be a difficult task. Therefore, the conclusion was drawn that the introverted person might be too uncomfortable to participate in offering a Coke and a Compliment even though he or she wished to offer one to a colleague. Another conclusion is that perhaps the interviewed teachers had not been the recipient of a Coke and a Compliment and therefore did not associate the program as a contribution to a positive school climate. Significant to this study, the perceptions of the principals and those of the teachers did not match.

Traditions.

While some of the teachers did recognize the principals' efforts regarding school traditions, the overwhelming reaction, if brought up at all, was not one of great gratitude. Teachers might have acknowledged the tradition, but not with the same level of enthusiasm as the administrator. One principal noted continued high levels of teacher participation from one year to the next as an indicator that the teachers enjoyed and appreciated the principal-planned activities. Some teachers did not feel it was fair to give the interviewed principal credit for a tradition started by a previous principal even though they understood the current administrator was not obligated to continue the traditions and even though they enjoyed the tradition.

Conclusions drawn regarding recognition suggested that the teachers who participated in the focus groups might not have been recipients of the recognition and therefore did not place value on recognition as a means of promoting a positive school climate. In contrast, all teachers

have the opportunity to participate in the traditions as described by the interviewed principals. Still, teachers of the focus groups did not perceive that traditions greatly contributed to creating or maintaining a positive school climate. This is significant because the perceptions of the principals are not aligned with those of the teachers.

Literature did not indicate traditions, as described in the current study, as a component of a positive school climate. Contrary to the lack of literature, the interviewed principals of the current study believed traditions to be an important part of their schools' climate. Of significance, the teachers did not perceive the traditions as favorably as the principals did. The teachers, overall, did not perceive the traditions as a noteworthy element of the schools' climate. Significantly, again, the perceptions of the principals and those of the teachers did not match.

Improving the School Climate

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

Kelley et al. (2005) found that teachers frequently had perceptions about the climate of the school that were different from those of the principal. In a study conducted by Pashiardis et al. (2005), however, teacher and principal perceptions were closely matched. The discrepancy might be explained by the differing circumstances of the studies. Traditionally, principals are hired by executives in a central office with little or no input from the teachers. Pashiardis et al. (2005) conducted their study in a secondary school where the principal was elected by his or her peers to serve a three-year term and where the teachers' input determined if the principal remained in that position or returned to the classroom at the end of each term. It was, professionally, to the principal's advantage to stay aware of teachers' perceptions.

Contrary to the literature that indicated the principal as the key figure in creating or maintaining a school's positive climate (Kelley et al., 2005; Thomas, 1997; Anderman et al.,

1991), the teachers of the first three focus groups indicated that the school's positive climate had little to do with the efforts of the principal and more to do with the relationships developed and shared by the teachers. They felt that a different group of teachers might not work as well together and therefore would not have the same climate. While this is possible, other explanations might be more plausible. For example, perhaps any group of teachers would develop strong relationships.

Another plausible explanation for the positive climate of the schools is that the principals' efforts are helping to maintain a positive school climate. In general, the teachers agreed that they enjoyed the traditions, rewards, and recognitions, but did not associate them with the positive climate of the school. Significantly, in the fourth school, the focus group seemed to have a more positive opinion of their principal and her efforts. They gave her credit for the positive climate of the school and acknowledged her efforts with affirmative comments.

Interestingly, in the current study, the teachers of the fourth focus group described their relationship with the administrators as strong. They rated their principal's effectiveness between four and five on a five-point scale. The overall tone of the focus group was generally one of contentment. The principal of this school also perceived the relationships she had with faculty members as strong. Significant to this study, the perceptions aligned in one of the four schools.

Principal visibility.

The individual principals and the teacher focus groups described principal visibility as one way to promote a positive climate for the schools. This supports the findings of Salisbury and McGregor (2002) and Devos and Bouckennooghe (2009) that suggested a positive school climate was more likely when principals showed support by frequently visiting teachers' classrooms.

In the current study, interviewed principals of the first and fourth schools indicated a desire to be in the classrooms more frequently but felt torn by their open-door policy. While they valued their open-door policy and believed it contributed to the building of strong relationships with faculty and community members, they also realized that the same time-consuming policy made it difficult for them to leave their offices and frequently visit classrooms and other areas of the school. Interviewed principals of the second and third schools did not indicate principal visibility as a means of promoting a positive climate, but the teachers of those focus groups did. One of the focus groups commented that student behavior and the noise level in the cafeteria were out of control and that parents had noticed this as well. The teachers of this focus group predicted that if administrators visited the cafeteria on a regular basis, then student behavior and overall climate would improve.

The focus group of the third school perceived their principal as one who was selectively visible and selectively interactive with students who had suffered a tragedy such as the loss of a parent or the experience of a difficult home life. They agreed the principal made an effort to be visible but that the effort needed to be more consistent and involve all students equitably.

The teachers of the second focus group described their principal as if she were almost invisible. They suggested she needed to be present in the classrooms, hallways, and cafeteria. One of the teachers of this focus group admitted that her students could not identify the principal when they saw her at the end of the year, indicating how few times the principal had been in her classroom.

Three of the four principals discussed visibility as one way they could improve their schools' climate. While principals in schools one and four acknowledged the need for greater visibility, the principal of school three described herself as one who was in the trenches, one who

was already visible. All of the teacher focus groups indicated that more visibility would be better. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that teachers perceive principal visibility as a significant means to improve the climate of a school.

Another conclusion determined after analyzing the qualitative data is that while the principals might understand the need for more visibility, the other demands of the position prevent them from meeting that need. Principals who maintain an open-door policy where they invite and encourage faculty, staff, parents, and community members to frequent their offices, to have conversations, and to build relationships also create a problem for themselves in that they simply run out of time during the school day to visit classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias.

A third conclusion regarding principal visibility is that the perceptions of principals differ from those of the teachers. This finding is consistent with most of the literature. Except for the findings of Pashiardis et al. (2005) where teacher and principal perceptions frequently matched, most literature supported the idea that perceptions did not match (Kelley et al., 2005; Rhodes et al, 2009). For example, the interviewed principal of the third participating school perceived she was visible, but the teachers of the focus group contradicted her and indicated the principal needed to be more visible. Based on this finding and supported by findings from Rhodes et al. (2009), the school's climate would probably benefit if the principal were more aware of the teachers' perceptions.

Obviously, principal visibility was a topic of significant discussion for teachers and principals and might be one area that principals need to consider as a top priority when trying to create or maintain a positive school climate. Although there are many demands of the elementary school administrators that make visibility a difficult objective, the overwhelming plea from the participating teachers indicate that the interviewed administrators of this study might

want to consider reevaluating how they spend their time during the school day. Supported by research (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009) and findings of the current study, principal visibility is an important factor in promoting a positive school climate.

Principal support.

Teachers and principals agreed that support was necessary but consistency regarding the specifics was lacking. Significant to this study are the differing perceptions between principals and teachers. While support was recognized by principals and teachers as an important component necessary for a positive school climate, they did not define support in similar ways. The teachers who were in schools where they did not feel supported had principals who perceived they were doing what they could to support teachers. A simple survey might not clarify this information for principals. Administrators need to discover how the teachers want to be supported. Again, the 2009 study conducted by Rhodes et al. shared similar findings indicating the importance of principals being aware of teachers' perceptions in order to create or maintain a positive school climate. Principal visibility emerged as one way that principals could show they supported teachers. Teachers also wanted to be heard and to feel valued by their principals. Principals of the schools where teachers are asking for more support might want to reevaluate what support means to the teachers.

After analyzing the qualitative data, important conclusions were reached related to support. A lack of understanding by the interviewed principals regarding what kind of support the teachers of the focus groups needed, prevented teachers from feeling supported by their principals. Principals, unaware that the teachers required different types of support, continued to show support to the best of their understanding. The importance of understanding the needs and perceptions of the teachers has been addressed in previous studies (Porter, Lemon & Landry,

1989; Bass, 1985; Pashiardis, Costa, Mendes, & Ventura, 2005; Arlestig, 2007; Cohen et al., 2009; Holdaway & Johnson, 1993; Gunbayi, 2007; Kelley et al., 2005; Bulach et al., 1995^a; Barth, 1984; Shouppe & Pate, 2010; Rhodes, Camic, Miburn, & Lowe, 2009). The current study also supported the findings of Porter et al. (1989), Kelley et al. (2005), Tubbs and Garner (2008), Lumsden (1998), and Bulach et al. (1995^a) in that the principal must be aware of the teachers' perceptions if creating or maintaining a positive school climate is a goal.

Relationship building and communication.

Building strong relationships and maintaining open lines of communication were frequently mentioned by principals and teachers as means of promoting a positive climate in their schools. This is consistent with the findings of Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) that indicated principals needed to build a sense of trust with their faculty in order to have a positive climate. Additionally, the current study supports the findings of Anderman et al. (1991) and Karakose (2008) in that principals need to develop a sense of respect between faculty members and administrators in order to build a positive school climate. Communication was deemed important in the literature (Halawah, 2005; Arlestig, 2007; Pepper & Thomas, 2002) and was supported by the current study.

The principal of the first school perceived relationships to be an important part of a positive school climate. He maintained an open-door policy and encouraged teachers to visit him to discuss concerns they had. He also tried to provide teachers with opportunities to socialize before faculty meetings. Teachers acknowledged this and appreciated the principal's efforts, but also wanted more time to collaborate in the classrooms with each other. In this case, perceptions of the principal and teacher did match in that building relationships was important to both groups.

The perception that principals of the second and third schools had regarding the community business owners as part of a positive school climate was not shared by the teachers of those schools. The teachers who participated in the focus groups at schools two and three did not recognize the principals' efforts to build strong relationships through the contacts made with the community business partners. Significant to this study, the teachers did not share this particular perception as a way to create or maintain a positive school climate.

In the third school, the principal tried to build relationships by learning teachers and students' names. She felt that an important way to promote a positive school climate was to recognize each person and call him or her by name. The teachers in the focus group of the third school did not mention the principal's effort to learn everyone's name as a component of the school's climate. Significant to this study, the teachers did not share this particular perception as a way to create or maintain a positive school climate.

In the fourth school, building relationships was vital to the principal's positive school climate. She believed that, to her advantage, she had been an assistant principal at this school for several years before being appointed principal and had been able to develop strong relationships with the faculty and staff members. She maintained an open-door policy as a principal and reasoned that teachers felt comfortable coming to her with questions and concerns on a personal as well as a professional level. The teachers of the focus group at this school agreed that relationships were strong between the faculty members and the administrators and likened the environment to that of a family. Even though the teachers felt the relationships were strong, they still desired not only more opportunities for socializing outside of school, but also more teachers who were willing to do so. Significant to this study, the teachers of the focus group of the fourth

school shared their principal's perception that strong relationships and open communication were evident at their school.

The qualitative data analysis indicated important conclusions regarding building relationships and maintaining two-way communication as they impacted the climate of the school. Two-way communication was also found to be important to a positive school climate in previous studies (Halawah, 2005; Menon & Christou, 2002; Arlestig, 2007). Building relationships and creating or maintaining open lines of communication were two areas that principals and teachers of the current study agreed contributed to a positive school climate. Building positive relationships between the one principal and the many teachers does not happen overnight. The open-door policy that two of the principals maintained was recognized and appreciated by the teachers of those focus groups and was helpful in building relationships and maintaining open communication. The principal of the first school had been the administrator at that school for just three years. The principal of the second school had been the administrator at her school for eight years and had previously been the assistant principal at the same school. Building relationships takes time. The teachers of the first focus group appreciated their principal's open-door policy and believed it to be helpful in terms of the school's climate. They also admitted that they perceived their principal to be uncomfortable with delivering criticism to them regarding expectations and teacher performance. In time, as relationships and trust build, he might feel more comfortable and be able to give the teachers the constructive criticism they crave.

While the other two principals perceived their efforts to build relationships to be effective, the teachers of those focus groups disagreed and perceived their principals to be unavailable much of the time, thus preventing the growth of a relationship. Both principals had

been assistant principals at their current schools before being appointed principals. One conclusion determined from analyzing the data, is that the open-door policy is not a priority at these two schools. The teachers of the focus groups from these two schools acknowledged that they needed their principals to be present and to be available for the school climate to be more positive. The teachers in both cases felt as if they were on their own.

Does the Alignment Differ Across Varying Achievement Levels?

Principal Leadership Styles

Regarding achievement levels and aligned perceptions of principal leadership styles, the second school had the highest overall state reported standard of learning scores of the participating schools. The principal's perception at this school and those of the interviewed teachers were not aligned. In the first school, with the lowest of the participating schools reported state standardized test scores, and the third school, with the third highest of the participating schools reported state standardized test scores, the perceptions of the principals and teachers were not aligned. In the fourth school, with the second highest overall scores compared to the other participating schools, the perceptions were aligned.

In summary, the only school where perceptions of the principal's leadership style were aligned was in the fourth school. This school ranked third in participating schools' reported state standardized test scores.

Previous Principals' Actions

Regarding achievement levels and aligned perceptions of principal leadership styles, the second school had the highest overall state reported standard of learning scores of the participating schools. In this case, the principal recalled several admired actions of her favorite former administrator such as promoting teamwork, allowing for school wide decision making,

and acknowledging hard work with praise, special treats left in teachers' mailboxes, and school wide spirit days. The teachers of this focus group acknowledged that they enjoyed the treats left in their mailboxes, but did not perceive the principal mimicked the other admired traits.

Perceptions in this case did not match.

In the fourth school which ranked second highest in participating schools' state reported standardized test scores, the principal described the administrator she most admired as one who maintained an open door policy and tried to create strong relationships with his faculty so that they would feel comfortable going to him for help if needed. The principal of the fourth school copied this quality, which was recognized and acknowledged by her teachers in their description of her. In this case, the perceptions were aligned.

In the third school, which ranked third highest among participating schools' state reported standardized test scores, the principal described a former admired administrator as one who trusted her to do her job, and recognized and rewarded teachers for their accomplishments. The teachers of the third school's focus group perceived their principal's efforts as inconsistent. Because the principal had been absent for several months, the teachers had difficulty recognizing consistent actions of the principal. When the principal was absent, substitute administrators managed the schools leaving teachers with unclear messages regarding expectations. The perceptions in this case were not aligned regarding whether the principal copied the actions of her favorite administrator or not.

The school with the lowest state reported standardized test scores was the first participating school. The principal of this school copied many of the traits and actions of his most admired principal to include laughing and joking, including teachers in decisions, and being approachable. The teachers of the first focus group affirmed his description except they did not

feel their opinions were valued in the decision making process. Perceptions in this case were mostly aligned.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Rewards.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of rewards, none of the perceptions was aligned regardless of student achievement levels. Again, the teachers who used the passes appreciated them; the teachers who did not use the passes did not appreciate them; and, none of the teachers whether or not they used the passes, believed they contributed to the climate of the school. The principals perceived the passes did contribute to the schools' climate.

Recognition.

Regarding the student achievement levels and the alignment of principals and teachers' perceptions of recognition, the perceptions did not match in any of the cases. The principals perceived recognizing teachers as a means of contributing to the positive climate of the school. None of the teachers in the focus groups acknowledged recognition as part of the school's climate.

Traditions.

Regarding the student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of traditions, the two schools that indicated some agreement were the first and fourth schools that participated. The first school's state reported standardized test scores were the lowest compared to the other three participating schools. In this case, socializing before faculty meetings and the principal's singing and guitar playing were recognized by the principal and the teachers as contributors to the climate of the school. The fourth school's state reported

standardized test scores were second highest compared to the other three participating schools. In this case, principal-planned opportunities for faculty members to socialize after school were recognized by the principal and teachers as contributors to the climate of the school.

Improving the School Climate

Principal effectiveness and school climate ratings.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of principals and teachers' perceptions of the schools' climate, the findings were mixed. The fourth participating school had the second highest state reported standardized test scores compared to the other three participating schools. The principal's and teachers' perceptions were aligned in reference to not only the rating they gave the school's climate, but also the tone of the interviews. Both the principal and the interviewed teachers seemed enthusiastic and genuinely happy about their school.

In the first participating school, student achievement levels, based on state reported standardized test scores, were the lowest of the four participating schools. While the ratings the principal and teachers gave the school's climate were not perfectly aligned, they were only apart by one point with the principal rating the climate as three and the teachers four out of a possible five points. The alignment difference was more apparent during the actual interviews. The tone of the principal was one of enthusiasm and belief that the school's climate was positive. The teachers, on the other hand, appeared less enthusiastic and less satisfied with the school's climate. The teachers gave much of the credit for the school's climate to the faculty members rather than the principal even though they rated his effectiveness as four out of possible five points.

In the third participating school, as reported by the state standardized test scores, student achievement levels were third highest compared to those of the other three participating schools. Again, the principal's and teachers' perceptions were not aligned, but, again, were only separated by one point with the principal rating the climate as four and the teachers three out of a possible five points. As was the case in the first participating school, the numbers did not tell the whole story. The principal of this school seemed confident that the school's climate was positive, yet the teachers seemed dissatisfied with the climate. They rated the principal's effectiveness as three out of a possible five points, but their overall tone was one of discontent.

The second participating school had the highest student achievement levels as reported by the state standardized test scores compared to the scores of the other three participating schools. The principal and teachers' perceptions were not aligned regarding the school's climate. The principal perceived the school's climate to be at four of a possible five points, but the teachers rated it as either two and one-half or three. This focus group rating of the school's climate was the lowest of the four participating schools. The teachers of this focus group rated their principal's effectiveness as three in terms of her efforts to create or maintain a positive school climate.

Principal visibility.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of principal visibility, the findings were mixed. In the first and fourth participating schools, where student achievement levels as reported by state standardized test scores were ranked lowest and the second highest, respectively, perceptions of the principals and teachers were aligned in that they agreed that principal visibility was necessary for a positive school climate.

In the second and third participating school, where student achievement levels based on state reported standardized test scores were the highest and third highest of the participating schools, the perceptions of teachers and the principal did not align. The principals did not indicate that visibility was a necessary part of the schools' climate, but the teachers did.

Principal support.

Regarding student achievement levels and the alignment of principals and teachers' perceptions of support as a way to improve school climate, the fourth school, which was second highest of the participating schools as reported by the state standardized test scores, presented the closest aligned perceptions. The interviewed principal and teachers of this school perceived that the principal's open-door policy contributed to the positive climate of the school and felt this was a means of supporting the teachers.

In schools two and three where student achievement levels, based on state reported standardized test scores, were highest and third highest of the four participating schools, the perceptions of support were not aligned. The principals felt they were offering what they could to support the teachers, but the teachers contended they did not feel supported and frequently felt they were left to fend for themselves.

In the first school, ranked lowest in student achievement of the participating schools, based on reported state standardized test scores, the teachers and principal's perceptions were partially aligned. Perceptions matched in that the open-door policy maintained by the principal was considered as support that contributed to the climate of the school, but teachers did not indicate a strong bond with the principal as teachers of the fourth school did.

Relationship building and communication.

In reference to student achievement levels and the alignment of teachers and principals' perceptions of relationship and communication, the findings were mixed. In the first and fourth schools, also the lowest and second highest, respectively, ranking of the participating schools in terms of student achievement based on state reported standardized test scores, the principals and interviewed teachers' perceptions were aligned because they believed building relationships and communication were important to improving the school's climate.

The second and third schools, respectively ranked highest and third highest in student achievement based on state reported standardized test scores of the participating schools, perceptions were not aligned. The principals of the second and third schools perceived building relationships with community businesses was important, but the interviewed teachers did not acknowledge this. The principal of the third school also attempted to build relationships by acknowledging teachers and students by name, but the teachers did not identify this as a contributor to the climate of the school.

Summary

These findings are significant since the school with the highest state reported standardized test scores of participating schools, the second school, had some of the lowest aligned perceptions. It should be noted, however, that only two teachers participated in the focus group of the second school. The teachers who did participate described a school with a below average to average school climate rating. They reported that support from the principal was minimal and that she was almost invisible even when she was at school. This is contrary to the research (Brookover et al., 1978; Hoy, 1990; Kelley et al., 2005; Chen, 2007) that suggests higher achieving schools have a positive school climate.

The principal at this school perceived her school's climate as positive and that the intentional actions she adopted to create or maintain a positive school climate for teachers were successful. She believed she was a leader who shared decision making with her faculty and adopted numerous actions to promote a positive school climate. Had the research stopped with the principal interviews, teachers' perceptions would not have been revealed and a misinterpretation of the school's climate might have occurred. Also, had survey research been conducted, clarification of the teachers' perceptions may have been missed. Admittedly, just two teachers participated in the school's focus group. This might have been a result of conflicting or hectic schedules that prevented other teachers from participating. Another explanation was described by a non-participating teacher from this school who indicated more people might have participated if the interviews had been individually conducted to assure greater anonymity. This comment might lead one to believe that teacher's with negative comments did not want to participate. The two teachers who did participate were honest and open with their feelings and perceptions of the principal and the school's climate.

Significant to this study and to the body of research on elementary school climate is that the principal's perceptions and those of the focus group were not aligned in spite of the high student achievement levels.

The third school ranked third based on state reported standardized test scores of participating schools. The principal of this school, understanding the importance of the school's climate, was enthusiastic and dedicated to promoting a positive school climate for her teachers. She also had adopted numerous actions to promote a positive school climate, yet teacher interviews revealed that teachers did not perceive those actions as contributing to the climate of the school. One of the biggest obstacles for the teachers of this school that influenced their

perceptions of the school's climate was the frequent and long-term absences of their principal. Although they understood her absences were unpreventable, the teachers still felt the absences led to inconsistencies in the administrative expectations of the teachers. The teachers perceived the climate of the school suffered because of the inconsistent leadership. This supported the findings in the fourth school where building relationships was found to be paramount to the school's positive climate. It would be difficult to form or maintain strong relationships if the administrator were absent and instead substitute administrators were present.

Also in the third school, the teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership style were different from the principal's perception. The principal perceived herself as one who shared decision making with faculty members, but the teachers of the focus group perceived the leadership style as more authoritarian. Further, the teachers did not acknowledge the intentional actions of the principal as promoting a positive school climate.

The first school ranked fourth in achievement levels of participating schools based on state reported standardized testing scores. The principal of the first school, similar to the principal of the second school, gave numerous examples of intentional actions he had adopted to promote a positive school climate for teachers. He perceived his leadership style as collaborative and described several opportunities for teachers to share in the decision making process.

Teachers perceived the principal as not a collaborative leader but a persuasive one. They believed that although he presented decisions to the faculty, he had made up his mind previously. They believed he presented ideas in such a way as to convince teachers that his choice was the best choice and that no real shared decision making occurred.

Building strong relationships takes time. The principal at the first school had been there for just three years. This principal believed a positive school climate was essential and perceived

that while there would always be room for improvement, he was moving in the right direction. To his advantage were his fun-loving personality, desire to promote a positive school climate, and a belief that strong relationships were important. Given more time to build meaningful relationships and to encourage teachers to be honest about their perceptions, the principal has the potential to create a positive school climate for teachers in a way that teachers perceive as positive too.

The fourth school ranked second highest among participating schools based on state reported standardized test scores. This school had an interesting history of principals prior to the current principal. The current principal was the seventh appointed within about a twelve-year time span. The high turnover rate created a problem for teachers since consistency from one administrator to the next was lacking. Personality styles differed greatly from one principal to the next. Developing trusting, meaningful relationships between faculty and administrators was almost impossible. The one common thread began when the current principal was hired as the assistant principal and stayed in that position for a number of years. This opportunity allowed her to develop relationships with the teachers over a period of time. When she was appointed principal of the school, many relationships had already been formed; she just needed to continue them. This, rather than the state reported standardized test scores, pajama days, or Golden Apple Awards, is one of the most important aspects of the school's positive climate. Other important factors included her willingness to share decision-making with the teachers and her desire to create a real family atmosphere at the school. Teachers acknowledged her efforts and appreciated them as they described the same values as the principal in terms of what the principal does to create a positive climate for teachers.

The second and third participating schools had a somewhat similar history to the fourth school's history in that the principals had also been assistant principals at their schools prior to being appointed principals. The difference was the teachers at those two schools did not share the same perceptions as the teachers of the fourth school regarding principal availability, shared decision-making, or relationships. Thus, this study supports the findings of Sahin (2011), Nir and Kranot (2006) in that strong relationships and shared decision-making are essential for a positive school climate.

Significant to this study and adding to the body of research on elementary school climate, is the finding that the teachers' perceptions are as important to the climate of an elementary school as the principal is. In this study, three of the four participating principals believed that their schools' climates were positive and that their intentional actions were effective in creating or maintaining that climate. The teachers in the focus groups of those same three schools perceived the principals' actions as not contributing to the schools' climates in a positive way. They perceived it was the combination of teachers who created the positive school climate and not the efforts of the principal. In the fourth school, credit for the positive school climate was given, by the teachers, to the principal and her efforts to build strong relationships.

Limitations

To determine possible threats to the validity of the study as well as imperfections in the design of the study, it is important to examine the limitations. This study has several limitations. One limitation is the focus group design that restricts the generalizability of the study. While the focus group design was chosen to allow for a greater understanding of teachers' perceptions, it also hindered the number of participants. One teacher who chose not to participate in the study declined because of the focus group design indicating a lack of anonymity among her colleagues.

Further, the study was limited by the lack of participants in two of the schools. The ideal focus groups would have had representatives from each grade level. Even after numerous pleas were sent and endorsed by the principals, to two of the participating schools, only two or three teachers were willing to join the focus groups. In one of these schools, two other teachers wanted to participate, but could not because of last minute meetings that had been scheduled.

Another limitation was the insider-interviewer role of the researcher. While I tried to maintain objectivity throughout the data collection and analyzing processes, it is possible that my experiences with participating schools influenced some of the findings. I have worked as a teacher in one of the participating schools. At the time, I thought the school's climate was poor at best. The principal who had been there for numerous years retired and following him were five others in the course of about 10 years. With each new principal came new expectations. There was no way to build a real relationship with a principal who only stayed in the position for two years. Trust became an issue. School climate and teacher morale, from my perspective, were extremely low. I expected the same type of results when I interviewed the current principal for this study, but was pleasantly surprised to hear she had been able to pick up the pieces of the school's climate and put them back together in a positive way.

I also worked in one of the other schools as a counselor and perceived the climate to be good at that time. I knew the principal and was thrilled that she seemed to be less active in the classrooms than other principals with whom I had worked. I thought that gave teachers the freedom in the classrooms to teach as they thought best. The findings of the study indicated that the interviewed teachers enjoyed not being micromanaged, but wanted more involvement from their principal. There has to be a happy medium between the principal being completely

uninvolved on one end of the spectrum and completely micro managing on the other end, as perceived by the teachers.

Another limitation to the study is that the participants were all elementary principals or elementary general education teachers; therefore, the selected participants represent just one area of the educational population. Even though the study has significant limitations, the findings are still valid but generalizability will have to be at the discretion of the individual readers.

Recommendations for Practice, Policy, and Research

Recommendations for practice and research are outlined in this section. They are derived from the analyzed data of this qualitative research study of what elementary school principals do to create a positive school climate and how teachers perceive those efforts.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

It is first recommended to elementary principals that they try to gain a better understanding of what their teachers really want and need in order to perceive the school's climate as positive. The interviewed principals, in many instances, simply had different perceptions than the teachers. Principals believed that the actions they adopted were helpful in creating a positive school climate, but the interviewed teachers perceived those efforts differently. A yearly survey of the teachers' perceptions would be a good start in helping the principals to know what the teachers think about the climate of the school and efforts of the principal. While surveys can be misinterpreted by those giving or receiving the survey, it would probably help give the principal a basic understanding of the perceptions of the teachers.

Principals participating in this study would benefit from having open and honest conversations with their teachers. The interviewed principals of the first, second, and third schools described various attempts and efforts they made to create or maintain a positive school

climate for their teachers. They cited passes for teachers to wear jeans and to leave school early, lunches they made or provided for teachers, family-friendly evening activities, opportunities for teachers to socialize, awards that recognized teachers, egg hunts, turkey hunts, and even a guitar-playing principal. Time after time, the teachers did not recognize these efforts as contributing to the climate of the school, although they did appreciate the efforts. More than the ability to leave early or wear pajamas to school, the teachers wanted to feel that their principal valued them, listened to and appreciated their ideas, and supported them in ways that met their professional needs. After the initial surveys are given, principals need to follow through with face-to-face conversations with individual teachers or even team leaders who represent a grade level. Such conversations are needed if principals truly want to know the perceptions of the teachers.

The open-door policy and long-standing relationships that the fourth principal shared with her faculty members were appreciated and acknowledged by the interviewed teachers as a solid part of the school's positive climate. While the first principal maintained an open-door policy, he had only been at the school for three years, probably not quite long enough to build strong relationships that are needed for the teachers to feel comfortable enough to share ideas and to feel valued. Building relationships takes time especially when one person, the principal, is trying to build meaningful relationships with twenty to thirty teachers. The recommendation, therefore, is for principals to work constantly on building those trusting relationships. While surveys can be helpful in building trust, teachers will likely only be as honest as they feel comfortable with the administrators. If teachers have a good rapport with the administrators, the surveys can be a useful tool. Face-to-face conversations will help principals clarify survey answers, but only if teachers feel comfortable enough to be open and honest with their

administrators. Building relationships takes valued time from the principals, but in the long run, will assist in building a positive school climate.

Finally, it is recommended that principals make every attempt to visit classrooms, hallways, and the cafeteria throughout the school day. The teachers perceived they were better supported when the principal was present throughout the school. Teachers did not necessarily want the principal to evaluate them or critique them during the visits, but just to stop in and be present in the classroom. Teachers in three of the schools felt that their principal was not present enough and felt that the climate of the school suffered because of it. Two of the four focus groups interviewed acknowledged that their principals' open-door policy prevented them from visiting classes throughout the day, but still felt it should be a priority for the principals. Visiting classrooms needs to become a routine part of the administrators' day. Teachers and students should not be surprised when the principal walks into the classroom; the visits should be that routine.

Policies for principals need to include a mandatory yearly survey of the teachers. The participating school system has a survey that is sent to parents each year; teachers are evaluated on that survey as well as by administrators; and principals are evaluated on the survey as well as by supervisors in the central office. Currently, principals are not required to survey teachers regarding teacher perceptions of principal actions. Perhaps if a yearly survey were mandatory, the principals of this study would have been more aware of the teachers' perceptions and would be able to adjust their efforts to improve the climates of their schools.

The recommendation for a mandatory yearly survey of teachers to help evaluate the principals' efforts regarding improving the schools' climate would need to have an accountability piece where principals are held accountable for their actions. The principals'

professional growth plan would be one such way to hold principals accountable. Principals would record the results of the survey in the professional growth plan and then reflect on what those results mean. Negative comments from teachers need to be viewed as opportunities for growth for the principal and not simply ignored. When teachers take the time to read and honestly complete a survey, they expect their opinions to be valued by those who read the survey results. This is yet another way for principals to build a positive relationship with teachers. If principals ignore negative comments and suggestions made by teachers, principals risk-giving teachers an unintended message that the surveys are meaningless.

Once the survey results have been recorded and principals have had the opportunity to reflect, principals need to devise a plan that addresses the issues brought forth by the teachers in the survey. The plan should then be reviewed by the principals' supervisors and implemented by the principals. Each year, the survey results should become part of the principals' professional growth plans and each year, the principals should be held accountable for improving the climate of the school.

A final recommendation is that professional development for principals needs to be considered. If principals attend professional development sessions that address the issues of school climate, perhaps principals would have a better understanding of what teachers perceive is necessary to improve the climate of the school. Learning how to build relationships with faculty members, learning how to budget one's time to include visits in classrooms, cafeterias, and hallways, and learning how to treat teachers professionally would be a good beginning for required professional development for principals, new and seasoned. Additionally, principals need to understand the importance of school climate. Research (Halpin & Croft, 1963; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Bulach, Malone, & Castleman, 1995; Chen, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1996;

Thomas, 1997; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Lumsden, 1998; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Desimone, 2002; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Tubbs & Garner, 2008; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010; Sterbinsky, Ross, & Redfield, 2006; Lee, 2000; Kartal & Bilgin, 2009) has indicated since at least the 1960s, that a positive school climate is linked to so many aspects of the school to include teacher morale, teacher retention rates, school disorder, school crime rates, the success of a school, effective learning environments, multicultural practices, acceptance of comprehensive school reform programs, the development of social competence in students, and student achievement levels. With so much resting on the importance of the school climate, educating the administrators in ways to improve it should be at the top of the priority list for central office supervisors.

Recommendations for Research

The qualitative method used in this study to investigate what elementary principals think they do to create a positive school climate for teachers and how those teachers perceive those efforts worked well since it allowed for clarification and a deeper understanding of the perceptions. While a survey would have provided some information, it would not have allowed participants a true voice in the study. The focus group interviews were used to elicit conversations among participants with the idea that teachers would feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions with each other. Perhaps future research of this topic would benefit from individual teacher interviews where teacher comments would remain anonymous and confidential. I think teacher participation in at least two of the school would have increased had the interviews been individually conducted. In addition, coordinating times and dates that were convenient for all participants were also logistically difficult. Perhaps with individual interviews, coordinating dates and times would be easier.

The present study addressed an absence in previous literature regarding school climate. Much of the previous literature centered around secondary schools whereas the current study's focus was on elementary schools. Future research needs to be conducted in the area of elementary school climate and to include perceptions of teachers other than those of general education classrooms, such as resource teachers or teachers of students with exceptional needs. This study concentrated on elementary general education classroom teachers for the sake of consistency, but I was approached by several resource teachers who would have liked to participate in the focus groups. The resource teachers and teachers of students with exceptional needs have perceptions of school climate not necessarily shared by the general education teachers. Future research needs to include this population to study the climate of elementary school teachers.

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Appendix A

Principal Interview Guide

I. Introductions, purpose of interview, anonymity

The principal will be informed of the purpose of the interview, the topic to be covered, and assured confidentiality about all information shared.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today to talk about your thoughts regarding the principal's role of school climate. You will be interviewed as part of my doctoral study.

Everything that you share with me will be confidential. I will not share any information with staff members or other principals. I will, however, share the information with my committee as necessary for completion of my studies. Your name and the names of others that you mention in the interview will not be used. Any other identifying information will not be used.

I would like to record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. Is that acceptable to you? The interview will then be transcribed word by word and a copy will be offered to you. I will make any changes or additions at your request.

During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please let me know. I plan for the interview to last approximately 30 minutes but you may stop the interview at any time you would like.

If you give me permission to use this information, please sign this consent form.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

(The interview will then begin with gaining information about ideas in the following areas :)

II. Demographic Information

1. How long have you been a principal at this school?
2. Have you been a principal in a different school and if so, where and how long?
3. What kinds of teaching experience do you have?

III. How do you define "climate?"

Probing questions will be asked if determined to be necessary and may include:

1. Researchers cannot seem to agree on a single definition of school climate so there is really no correct or incorrect answer. What do you think determines the environment or climate of the school?
2. What components or characteristics make up the school's environment or climate?

- IV. Think of the schools you enjoyed working in as a teacher. What did the principal in that or in those schools do to create a positive climate for teachers?

Probing questions will be asked if determined to be necessary and may include:

1. In trying to make the work environment positive, what did the principal(s) do specifically for the teachers?
2. Some of my research indicated that principals tried to support their teachers, promote cooperation, empower teachers, and effectively supervise them. What can you say about your previous principals regarding any of those actions? What, if anything, did previous principals do to improve those areas?
3. Did principals seek teacher feedback regarding the principals' efforts to improve school climate?

- V. What do you do to create a positive climate for your teachers?

Probing questions will be asked if determined to be necessary and may include:

1. Most of the research indicated the principal as key to the school's climate. You are in a unique position in the school to make decisions that directly affect the climate. What do you intentionally do to create or maintain a positive climate in your school?
2. What kinds of activities do you plan specifically for the teachers to create or maintain a positive climate?
3. Do you seek teacher feedback regarding your efforts to improve the school's climate?
4. Some research indicated that principals in schools with positive climate were aware of their teachers' strengths and weaknesses. To what extent do you feel you are aware of your teachers' strengths and weaknesses? How do you bring this to their attention?

- VI. What kind of leadership style do you have?

Probing questions will be asked if determined to be necessary and may include:

1. What words best describe your style of leadership?
2. Do you tend to make decisions on your own or include faculty members?
3. What kind techniques do you use to influence teachers to do what you want?

VII. Miracle question

If you were to arrive at the perfect school climate, what would it look like?
What would the essential steps be in getting there?

VIII. Scale question

If you were to rank it on a scale of 1-5 (five being the closest to perfection),
where is your school on that line to the perfect school climate?

IX. Future question

What would you have to do differently to change or improve the climate of your school?

X. Closure

I do not have any more questions. Is there anything you would like to add? Anything
else you believe I should know?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me. As I
mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with
the information you have given me. I will get a copy of the transcribed interview to you
so that you may review it and make any changes or additions. Again, thank you for your
time.

Appendix B

Teacher Focus Group Interview Guide

I. Introductions, purpose of interview, anonymity

The teachers will be informed of the purpose of the interview, the topic to be covered, and assured confidentiality about all information shared.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today to talk about your thoughts regarding the climate of your school and the intentional actions your principal adopts to maintain that climate. You will be interviewed as part of my doctoral study.

Everything that you share with me will be confidential. I will not share any information with staff members or other principals. I will, however, share the information with my committee as necessary for completion of my studies. Your name and the name of others that you mention in the interview will not be used. Any other identifying information will not be used.

I would like to record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. Is that acceptable to you? The interview will then be transcribed word by word and a copy will be offered to you. I will make any changes or additions at your request.

During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please let me know. I plan for the interview to last approximately 30 minutes but you may stop the interview at any time you would like.

If you give me permission to use this information, please sign this consent form.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

(The interview will then begin with gaining information about ideas in the following areas :)

II. Demographic Information

1. How long have you been a teacher at this school?
2. Have you been a teacher in a different school and if so, where and for how long?
3. What kinds of teaching experience do you have?

III. How would you define “climate?”

Probing questions will be asked if determined to be necessary and may include:

1. Researchers cannot seem to agree on a single definition of school climate so there is really no correct or incorrect answer. What do you think determines the environment or climate of the school?
2. What components or characteristics make up the school’s environment or climate?

IV. What does your principal intentionally do to create a positive climate for teachers?

Probing questions will be asked if determined to be necessary and may include:

1. Most of the research indicated the principal as key to the school’s climate. The principal is in a unique position in the school to make decisions that directly affect the climate. What do you think your principal intentionally does to create or maintain a positive climate in your school?
2. What kinds of activities do you think your principal plans specifically for the teachers to create or maintain a positive climate?
3. Does your principal seek your feedback regarding efforts to create or maintain a positive school climate?
4. Some research indicated that principals in schools with positive climates were aware of their teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. In your opinion, to what extent is your principal aware of your strengths and weaknesses? How does he or she inform you of your strengths and weaknesses?

V. How would you describe your principal’s leadership style?

Probing questions will be asked if determined to be necessary and may include:

1. What words best describe your principal’s style of leadership?
2. Does your principal tend to make decisions on his or her own or include faculty members?
3. What kind of techniques do you believe your principal uses to influence teachers to do what he or she wants?

VI. On a scale of 1 -5 (five being the highest), how effective would you say are the things your principal does in maintaining a respectful school climate?

VII. Miracle question

If you were to arrive at the perfect positive school climate, what would it look like? What would be the essential steps in getting there? What could your principal do to get there?

VIII. Scale question

If you were to rank it on a scale of 1-5 (five being the closest to perfection), where is your school on that line to the perfect school climate?

IX. Future question

What would you like to see your principal do differently to change or improve the climate of your school?

X. Closure

I do not have any more questions. Is there anything you would like to add? Anything else you believe I should know?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given me. I will get a copy of the transcribed interview to you if you would like so that you may review it and make any changes or additions. Again, thank you for your time.

Appendix C

Table of Specifications for Principal Interview Guide

| Question | Rationale | Page Reference |
|---|---|----------------|
| 1. How do you define school climate? | Asked to determine principals' perspective of the term "school climate" that is widely used yet not defined by researchers. Hoy & Miskel (2005); Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland (2002); Smith & Maika (2008); Halawah (2005); Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty (2005); Ross, McDonald, Alberg, & McSparrin-Gallagher (2007) | Page 3 |
| | Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf (2008) | Page 4 |
| | The literature review section dedicated to "School Climate Defined" shows the inconsistencies among researchers regarding the definition of "school climate." It is important to this study to know participants' definitions to determine if, when they discuss school climate, they are referring to the same concept as their teachers or not. | Page 24 |
| | Hoy (1990) suggested that the climate of a school is relatively long lasting and founded on the combined perceptions of actions in the school. Hoy et al. (2002) explained that administrators and teachers within a school experienced its climate and were affected by it in terms of their outlook on the work environment. | Page 24 |
| 2. Think of the schools you enjoyed working in as a teacher. What did the principal in that or in those schools do to create a positive climate for teachers? | Effective communication (Halawah, 2005; Arlestig, 2007) is one way to promote a positive school climate. | Pages 26 & 32 |
| | Moolenaar et al. (2010) described the transformational leader as one who makes communication more effective thus promoting a positive school climate. Much research supports the idea that principals' actions create the schools' climate. This question explores what an administrator viewed as important when he or she was | Page 6 |

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| | a teacher. Did the principal copy or reject those ideas? | |
| 3. What do you do to create a positive school climate for your teachers? | <p>The research indicates the importance of the principals' actions and decisions regarding the development of the schools' climate. This question explores the principals' perceptions of his or her intentional actions taken to promote a positive school climate.</p> <p>Based on research, there are many ways a principal creates or maintains a positive school climate. This question allows participants the opportunity to explain their perceptions of the actions they take to promote a positive climate for their schools. For example, Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Kelley et al. (2005) found that building trust was important. Anderman et al. (1991) and Karakose (2008) found developing respect to be essential. MacNeil et al. (2009) indicated that the principal needed to create structures that could support the school in times of stress. Freiberg and Stein (1999) added that principals need to be aware of teachers' strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Open-ended questions allow participants to form their own ideas without the researcher asking leading questions that might sway their answers. Jackson et al. (2007) supported this claiming that qualitative research allowed the investigator the ability to ask open-ended questions thus provided a rich, thick description.</p> | <p>Pages 6-10 & 32-36</p> <p>Page 8</p> <p>Page 16</p> |
| 4. What kind of leadership style do you have? | Some research indicated a link between leadership style and the climate of the school suggesting transformational and invitational leaders to be the most likely to create schools with positive climates (Egley & Jones, 2005; Bossert et al., 1982; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Nir & Kranot, 2006; Moolenaar et al., 2010). This question allows the principal participants to comment on their perceived leadership style. | Pages 6, 33-37 |
| 5. If you were to arrive at the perfect school climate, what would it look like? What would the essential steps be in getting there? | This question ties back to the definition of climate. It also links principals' knowledge of what he or she intentionally does to create a positive school climate. Arlestig (2007), Bass (1989), Egley and Jones (2005), Gottfredson et al. (2005), Halawah (2005), Lontos (1992), and Kelley et al. (2005) agree that effective leadership requires the principal to be aware of and then carry out specific behaviors to establish and maintain an effective and successful school. Hoy (1990) emphasized that school climate is a known factor in effective schools. | Page 32-27 |
| 6. What would you | This question allows participants to reflect on and | Page 36 |

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| do differently to change or improve the climate of your school? | acknowledge any shortcomings in their quest for a positive school climate. Unless the school's climate is already perfect, the participants might be able to shed light on other steps they could take or are planning to take to improve the climate of the school. Kelley et al. (2005) stated that the principal needs to correctly envision the potential needs of the faculty and staff. | |
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Appendix D

Table of Specifications for Teacher Interview Guide

| Question | Rationale | Page Reference |
|---|--|--|
| 1. How do you define school climate? | <p>Asked to determine teachers' perspective of the term "school climate" that is widely used yet not defined by researchers.</p> <p>Hoy & Miskel (2005); Hoy, Smith, Sweetland (2002); Smith & Maika (2008); Halawah (2005); Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty (2005); Ross, McDonald, Alberg, McSparrin-Gallagher (2007)</p> <p>Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf (2008)</p> <p>The literature review section dedicated to "School Climate Defined" shows the inconsistencies among researchers regarding the definition of "school climate." It is important to this study to know participants' definitions to determine if, when they discuss school climate, they are referring to the same concept as their principals or not.</p> <p>Hoy (1990) suggested that the climate of a school is relatively long lasting and founded on the combined perceptions of actions in the school.</p> <p>Hoy et al. (2002) explained that administrators and teachers within a school experienced its climate and were affected by it in terms of their outlook on the work environment.</p> | <p>Page 3</p> <p>Page 4</p> <p>Page 24</p> <p>Page 24</p> <p>Page 24</p> |
| 2. What does your principal intentionally do to create a positive school climate? | <p>This question explores the teachers' perceptions regarding their principals' intentional actions to promote a positive school climate. Research supported the importance of teachers' perceptions indicating that a school's climate flourished or suffered depending on the teachers' perceptions (Kelley et al., 2005; Pashiardis et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2009; Freiberg & Stein, 1999).</p> <p>In order for the principals' actions to be effective in creating a positive school climate, the teachers must perceive those actions as positive (Pashiardis et al., 2005; Rhodes et al., 2009). Asking the teachers to describe their perceptions is supported</p> | <p>Page 11</p> <p>Page 34</p> |

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| | by this research. | |
| 3. How would you describe your principal's leadership style? | <p>Research indicated mixed results regarding the importance of the principals' leadership styles as related to school climate. Bulach et al. (1995^a) suggested, in fact, no connection existed; others, however, reported the opposite.</p> <p>Pepper and Thomas (2002) and Moolenaar et al. (2010) agreed that the transformational style of leadership promoted an environment conducive to a positive school climate.</p> <p>Invitational leaders were described as those who promoted collaboration and respect within the school community thus also creating an environment more likely to have a positive climate (Egley & Jones, 2005).</p> <p>This question continues to explore perceptions of teachers regarding their principals. Data collected may be used to compare principals' descriptions of their own leadership style with teachers' perceptions of them.</p> | <p>Page 6</p> <p>Page 6</p> <p>Page 7</p> |
| 4. On a scale of 1-5, how effective would you say are the things your principal does in maintaining a positive school climate? | Again, exploring the perceptions of the teachers, this question is based partially on the research of Bulach et al. (1995 ^a) and Shouppe and Pate (2010) who agreed that when the teachers perceived that the principal was meeting their needs, they also perceived a positive school climate. | Page 10 |
| 5. If you were to arrive at the perfect school climate, what would it look like? What would the essential steps be in getting there? What could your principal do to get there? | This question ties back to the definition of climate. It also links teachers' perceptions of what the principal intentionally does to create a positive school climate. Arlestig (2007), Bass (1989), Egley and Jones (2005), Halawah (2005), Lontos (1992), and Kelley et al. (2005) agreed that effective leadership required the principal to be aware of and then carry out specific behaviors to establish and maintain an effective and successful school. Hoy (1990) emphasized that school climate is a known factor in effective schools. | Pages 32-37 |
| 6. What would you like to see your principal do differently to change or improve the | This question allows participants to reflect on and acknowledge any shortcomings in their quest for a positive school climate. Unless the school's | Page 12 |

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| climate of your school? | <p>climate is already perfect, the participants might be able to shed light on other steps they could take or are planning to take to improve the climate of the school. As indicated by Kelley et al. (2005), teachers might realize actions that the principal could take to improve the climate of the school but are reluctant to suggest. This question gives teacher the opportunity to voice their suggestions and perceptions of potential ways to improve the climate of their school. Holdaway and Johnson (1993) explained a difference in teacher and principal perceptions with principals frequently rating the schools' climate as higher than the teachers' perceived.</p> | Page 11 |
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Appendix E

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (P)

TITLE: An Examination of What Principals Do to Create Positive School Climates for Teachers in Elementary Schools and How Teachers Perceive Those Efforts

VCU IRB NO.:

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the actions that elementary school principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers. Additionally, this research will focus on the teachers' perceptions of the principals' actions. The results of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on the topic of establishing and/or maintaining a positive school climate.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

In this study, you will be asked to participate in one qualitative in-depth audio-taped interview that may last approximately 30 - 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your perceptions of school climate, the climate of your current school, the actions you take to create or maintain that climate, and your leadership style. Your interview will be tape recorded to ensure that your responses are being reported accurately. No names or other identifying details will be recorded on tape. Significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

While it is not anticipated that discussing this subject will cause you to be uncomfortable or feel upset, you do not have to discuss any subjects that you do not wish to and you may end your participation in the interview at any time.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but the information we learn from participants in this study may assist other principals in creating or maintaining a positive school climate in their own schools.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the interview and checking for accuracy once the interview is transcribed.

Appendix E

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (P)

ALTERNATIVES

You may choose not to participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of interview notes and recordings. Data is being collected only for research purposes. Your data will be identified by ID numbers or pseudonyms, not names, and stored in a locked research area. All data will be kept in password protected files, and these files will be deleted upon completion of this project. Paper notes and recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet (paper notes) and/or a password protected file (electronic notes) for six months after the study ends and will be destroyed at that time. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

The interviews will be audio taped, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the session, all members will be asked to use initials only so that no names are recorded. The tapes and the notes will be stored in a locked cabinet. After the information from the tapes is transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:

- you have not followed study instructions;
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

Appendix E

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (P)

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Dr. Whitney S. Newcomb, Associate Professor
Educational Leadership Department, School of Education
Virginia Commonwealth University
Room 2106, Oliver Hall
P.O. Box 842020
Richmond, VA 23284-2020
Email: whsherman@vcu.edu
Office: (804) 828-8724
Fax: (804) 827-0771

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

Appendix E

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (P)

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

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| Participant name printed | Participant signature | Date |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------|

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion/Witness
(Printed)

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| Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion/Witness | Date |
|--|------|

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| Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above) | Date |
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Appendix F

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (T)

TITLE: An Examination of What Principals Do to Create Positive School Climates for Teachers in Elementary Schools and How Teachers Perceive Those Efforts

VCU IRB NO.:

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the actions that elementary school principals adopt to promote a positive school climate for their teachers. Additionally, this research will focus on the teachers' perceptions of the principals' actions. The results of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on the topic of establishing and/or maintaining a positive school climate.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

In this study, you will be asked as a member of a teacher focus group to participate in one qualitative in-depth audio-taped interview that may last approximately 30 - 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your perceptions of school climate, the climate of your current school, the actions your principal takes to create or maintain that climate, and your principal's leadership style. Your interview will be tape recorded to ensure that your responses are being reported accurately. No names or other identifying details will be recorded on tape. Significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

While it is not anticipated that discussing this subject will cause you to be uncomfortable or feel upset, you do not have to discuss any subjects that you do not wish to and you may end your participation in the interview at any time.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but the information we learn from participants in this study may assist other principals in creating or maintaining a positive school climate in their own schools.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the interview and checking for accuracy once the interview is transcribed.

Appendix F

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (T)

ALTERNATIVES

You may choose not to participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of interview notes and recordings. Data is being collected only for research purposes. Your data will be identified by ID numbers or pseudonyms, not names, and stored in a locked research area. All data will be kept in password protected files, and these files will be deleted upon completion of this project. Paper notes and recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet (paper notes) and/or a password protected file (electronic notes) for six months after the study ends and will be destroyed at that time. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

The interviews will be audio taped, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the session, all members will be asked to use initials only so that no names are recorded. The tapes and the notes will be stored in a locked cabinet. After the information from the tapes is transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:

- you have not followed study instructions;
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

Appendix F

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (T)

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Dr. Whitney S. Newcomb, Associate Professor
Educational Leadership Department, School of Education
Virginia Commonwealth University
Room 2106, Oliver Hall
P.O. Box 842020
Richmond, VA 23284-2020
Email: whsherman@vcu.edu
Office: (804) 828-8724
Fax: (804) 827-0771

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: (804) 827-2157

Appendix F

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (T)

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Participant name printed | Participant signature | Date |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------|

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion/Witness
(Printed)

| | |
|--|------|
| Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion/Witness | Date |
|--|------|

| | |
|--|------|
| Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above) | Date |
|--|------|

APPENDIX G

Dear (Principal):

(Date)

I am currently a doctoral candidate enrolled in Virginia Commonwealth University and an elementary school counselor in Hanover County Public Schools. As part of the requirements of VCU's Educational Leadership doctoral program, I am conducting qualitative research to analyze the actions principals take to create positive school climates for teachers and teachers' perceptions of those efforts. The study includes individual interviews of four elementary school principals to determine what they intentionally do to create or maintain the positive climate of their schools. Additionally, focus group interviews consisting of six general education teachers from within each of those schools will shed light on how those efforts are perceived.

This study has been reviewed and approved according to the division policy on research so that I may contact principals and teachers within your school district. It is anticipated that interviews will last approximately 30-60 minutes and will be conducted after contract hours and not during the restricted timeframe of March 1 – June 7, 2013. Although participation is voluntary, I would greatly appreciate your input. The promise of strict confidentiality is assured in the collection and reporting of the data. Any findings obtained in connection with this study will be presented so that no individual school or person will be identifiable.

As an elementary school counselor, I am hopeful that the study's findings will assist other principals in creating or maintaining a positive school climate in their own schools. The importance of a positive school climate has been long recognized and documented as it is connected to many aspects of the school to include teacher morale, student achievement, school disorder, school crime rates, multicultural practices, the successfulness of a school, and the effectiveness of the learning environment. It is expected that the results of this study will not only benefit other principals but will also contribute to the body of knowledge on the topic of establishing and/or maintaining a positive school climate.

To participate in the study or if you have questions regarding the study, please contact me at cziolkowski@hcps.us or (xxx) xxx-xxxx. For your convenience, I have attached the consent form for your review. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the VCU Office of Research at (804) 827-2157. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carol Anne H. Ziolkowski
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Commonwealth University

APPENDIX H

Dear (Teacher):

(Date)

I am currently a doctoral candidate enrolled in Virginia Commonwealth University and an elementary school counselor in Hanover County Public Schools. As part of the requirements of VCU's Educational Leadership doctoral program, I am conducting qualitative research to analyze the actions principals take to create positive school climates for teachers and teachers' perceptions of those efforts. The study includes individual interviews of four elementary school principals to determine what they intentionally do to create or maintain the positive climate of their schools. Additionally, focus group interviews consisting of six general education teachers from within each of those schools will shed light on how those efforts are perceived.

This study has been reviewed and approved according to the Hanover County Public School policy on research. With this permission and your principal's consent, I am contacting regular education teachers to participate in focus group interviews. The audio-taped interviews will last approximately 30-60 minutes and will take place in your school during non-contract hours. Your decision to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with your current employer. Should you determine the need to withdraw from the study later, any data associated with the information you provided will be properly discarded. The promise of strict confidentiality is assured in the collection and reporting of the data. Any findings obtained in connection with this study will be presented so that no individual school or person will be identifiable. By giving consent and participating in this study, you will be giving me permission to publish aggregated results in my dissertation, in peer reviewed journals, and at professional conferences.

As an elementary school counselor, I am hopeful that the study's findings will assist principals in creating or maintaining a positive school climate in their own schools, which in turn, will benefit the teachers. The importance of a positive school climate has been long recognized as it is connected to many aspects of the school to include teacher morale, student achievement, the successfulness of a school, and the effectiveness of the learning environment. It is expected that the results of this study will not only benefit other principals but will also contribute to the body of knowledge on the topic of establishing and/or maintaining a positive school climate.

To participate in the study or if you have questions regarding the study, please contact me at czolkowski@hcps.us or (xxx) xxx-xxxx. For your convenience, I have attached the consent form for your review. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the VCU Office of Research at (804) 827-2157. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carol Anne H. Ziolkowski
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Commonwealth University